

**A KINGDOM OF WORDS:**  
**MINANGKABAU SOVEREIGNTY IN SUMATRAN HISTORY**

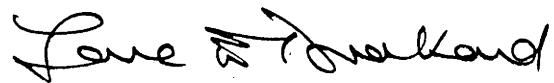
**Jane Drakard**

**A thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
at the Australian National University**

**March 1993**



This thesis represents the results of my own research. Where I have drawn on the work of other scholars due acknowledgment has been made in the text.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jane Drakard". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned centrally on the page.

Jane Drakard

"Il est très difficile, on peut même dire impossible, d'utiliser les traditions Malaises pour reconstruire l'histoire de Sumatra."

O.J.A. Collet, *Terres et Peuples de Sumatra*, p.76.

"It is the word, blossoming as legend, poem, story, secret, that holds a community together and gives meaning to its life."

George Mackay Brown, *An Orkney Tapestry*, p. 29.



## ABSTRACT

The thesis is concerned with the nature of royal authority in the Sumatran inland kingdom of Minangkabau in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It takes as its point of departure the problem posed by early European perceptions of that authority. European contacts were with the coasts of Sumatra. The Minangkabau heartland, behind its mountain barrier, appeared remote and inaccessible. The Dutch, following on the heels of the Portuguese in the seventeenth century, were contemptuous of the rulers of Minangkabau, describing them as powerless - as kings <sup>in</sup> word only and not in deed. This view has been repeated by many subsequent observers, some of whom have spoken of the sacral or the symbolic nature of Minangkabau claims.

The thesis will argue that the Minangkabau kings were far from being mere figureheads or possessors of merely symbolic authority. They provided a focus for unity extending far beyond the inland centre of the kingdom and were a means of mobilizing a supra-*nagari* identity. The use of the king's name by his subjects in the *rantau*, royal intervention in local movements of resistance to the Dutch and the creation of an extended communications network combined to indicate the presence of genuine political substance. The Dutch had to come to terms with that force and themselves found it useful, on occasion, to rely on the king's name. Attention is given to the details of Dutch contacts with coastal regions, to their initial contacts with the inland court itself and to the development of movements of resistance to the VOC.

The cultural encounter embodied in these early contacts is approached through a study of the VOC archives which are read for the light they throw on Dutch perceptions and expectations as well as for the events they report.

Central to the argument of the thesis is the view that the king's power lay, to a considerable extent in the language of royal communication and in the substance given by his subjects to the signs of his authority. Attention is given in detail, therefore, to a range of royal letters. Many of these are to be found in Dutch translation in the archives of the VOC. These have been studied in the context of a corpus of manuscript Malay letters from the nineteenth century which were discovered in the course of research for the thesis. The study of the words and the format of these letters enables conclusions to be drawn about Minangkabau perceptions of authority and about its substance.

A semiotic approach to the communicative process rather than one which focusses on the institutional structure of the Minangkabau state, it is argued, can throw significant light on the meaning of Minangkabau kingship during this period.

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## PREFACE

*A Kingdom of Words* is an attempt to understand the nature of one Southeast Asian political tradition in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Students of Southeast Asia have used a variety of models to characterise what are often referred to as "state structures" in the region before the nineteenth century. These models range from "hydraulic society", "segmentary state" and royal "absolutism" to "theatre state" and "*Kerajaan*".<sup>1</sup> Much of this work has centred on explaining the way in which the divine world, especially as it was manifested in kingly attributes, was linked to the organizational and economic activities of the "state". Not all Southeast Asian polities can easily be characterised as "states" however.<sup>2</sup>

The Alam Minangkabau in central Sumatra is a case in point. The Minangkabau "world", as it was known to the Minangkabau themselves, was composed of an inner and an outer sphere linked by migration, lineage affiliation and common traditions. The centre and periphery responded to each other in a unity known as the Alam, but there were few recognisable "state structures" and "organs of government" to bind them.<sup>3</sup> A dynasty of kings who dwelt in the inland centre of Minangkabau are regarded as having given some sense of unity to the Alam, but this is usually seen as weak institution in governmental terms.

None of the existing models of Southeast Asian political structure is entirely applicable to the Minangkabau case. On the other hand, methodological insights gleaned from work on other Southeast Asian polities may contribute to an understanding of Minangkabau political life. In recent years there has been an increasing emphasis on the importance of "symbolic action" as much as on institutional structures in the study of Southeast Asian polities.<sup>4</sup> Even more recently analysts have begun to emphasise the role of language in the ritual and symbolic life of Southeast Asian communities.

The present study focuses on language and the communicative patterns through which the Alam Minangkabau was realised and expressed by the Minangkabau people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Rather than a general model, my concern here is to investigate the meanings of Minangkabau kingship in this period of Sumatran history.

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent review of the available literature on Southeast Asian states see G.C. Bentley, "Indigenous States of Southeast Asia", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 15, 1986, 275-305.

<sup>2</sup> One recent model of Malay political behaviour eschews this term entirely, and uses a local characterisation of the polity. See A.C. Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule*, Tucson, The University of Arizona Press, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> The "institutional traditions" which the *rantau* and *darat* held in common are discussed by J. Kathirithamby-Wells in "Myth and Reality: Minangkabau institutional traditions in the *rantau*", in L.L. Thomas and F. von Benda-Beckmann, *Change and Continuity in Minangkabau*, Athens: Ohio University, 1985, pp. 121-141.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Lorraine Gesick (ed.), *Centres, Symbols, and Hierarchies: Essays on the Classical States of Southeast Asia*, New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1983, Introduction; Sandhu, K.S. and Wheatley, P. (eds.), *Melaka. The Transformation of a Malay Capital, c. 1400-1980*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1983; Milner, *Kerajaan*; and C. Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.



Like most research the study has evolved in a variety of unforeseen directions. When I began work on this topic I was aware that a small clutch of "strange" Minangkabau letters had been published in English translation in eighteenth and nineteenth century works. I hoped to find a Malay copy of one of these letters to see what sort of local terms and categories were used by the rulers. I was lucky to find many more than one. Moreover, it also became clear that there were other, seventeenth century, letters from Minangkabau kings translated in the Dutch East India Company archives. This meant that I could try to look at the language of Minangkabau kingship at a crucial period in Malay history, only some fifty years after the earliest known text of the most famous royal chronicle in Malay, the *Sejarah Melayu*.

I began to probe the Dutch archives to discover the context in which these letters from the Minangkabau kings were written. Then, in 1989, Hendrik Maier suggested to me that I could hardly understand Dutch descriptions of Minangkabau political action without looking carefully at seventeenth century Dutch preconceptions. This made sense and it also resonated with the points which Ranajit Guha and the subaltern studies group were making about the need for close, textual, scrutiny of colonial archives, and with the general wariness of European constructions of the east which has been encouraged by E. Said's *Orientalism*. The project began to become a study not only of Minangkabau language, but also of the language of the VOC reports on Minangkabau.

As contrasting patterns and preoccupations emerged from my reading of these sources, the third theme of this thesis began to develop. To try to understand Minangkabau kingship in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, I realised, it was necessary to set Dutch and Minangkabau languages of authority in the context of the cultural encounter between these two groups. Inspired by Todorov's *Conquest of America* and the work of members of the "Melbourne School" of Ethnohistorians, such as Inga Clendinnen and Greg Denning, I hoped, in a more modest way, to develop a picture of the meeting of cultural worlds which took place in west Sumatra when the VOC came to trade and, in some part, to govern in the 1660's. By setting the study in this context I have sought to locate my reading of the Dutch discourse and, more importantly, of Minangkabau royal language in an exploration of cross-cultural perceptions.

As an analysis of modes of authority in Sumatra this is a study in cultural history and social and economic historians will notice that less attention has been given to trading imperatives than they might like. Quite apart from questions of the length and scope which is appropriate in a doctoral dissertation, it should be noted that a major study of social, economic and religious change in Minangkabau has appeared in recent years in Christine Dobbin's *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy*. The present study could not have been written without the basis provided by that treatment. The present study, however, is concerned with a different, and, I hope, complimentary set of questions.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis was written while I was a student in the Division of Pacific and Asian History in the Research School of Pacific Studies. There can be few more congenial places in which to pursue research. I count myself fortunate to have been Tony Reid's student. He was enthusiastic about the project from the beginning and he has provided continuing and patient support. I am particularly grateful for his detailed comments on drafts of the thesis which have combined his knowledge of Southeast Asian history with critical insights and encouragement.

My thesis advisers, Tony Milner and Campbell Macknight, have both aided the project in numerous ways. Tony Milner has responded to many enquires about Malay texts and their readings and has pushed me to probe more deeply into their language and structure. Discussions with Campbell Macknight have shaped the way I approach certain points. All three members of my committee have contributed to providing a stimulating and supportive environment as a student could hope for. Virginia Matheson-Hooker has also acted as an adviser, for a period. In that capacity and also unofficially she has been encouraging and characteristically generous with her time and her knowledge of Malay literature.

I am indebted to a number of people in Indonesia who contributed to this thesis in important ways. Thanks are due to Hasan Ambary who sponsored my visits to Indonesia. I am grateful to Puteri Dismah at Pagaruyung and members of her family including Wisran Hadi and Rondha Taib who shared their knowledge of Minangkabau royal history with me, showed me heirlooms and introduced me to other descendants of the royal house. In Padang Sjafnir Aboe Nain, Dr Abdul Aziz Saleh and Dr Khadir Anwar and Mrs Khadiri Anwar were very helpful. I am indebted to Puti Balun of Balun in Sungai Paguh; Pak Asran in Lubuk Layang in Rao and to Roestam Anwar Angku Tumanggung all of whom gave me important material help. In Pekan Baru Pak Tenas Effendi was generous with his time and his deep knowledge of local history.

I have used archival material from several different collections and have received support and cooperation from many people in these institutions. I am grateful to George Miller of the Australian National University Library and to Helen Soemardjo of Monash University Library, both of whom have generously ordered microfilm materials I needed and helped in other ways. Dra Tuti Munawar and Dra Putri Minerva Mutiara of the National Library in Jakarta and Mrs M.C.J.C van Hoof of the Algemeen Riksarchief in the Hague have been extremely helpful. I am also grateful to the staff of the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land en Volkenkunde in Leiden and of the manuscript reading room of the Leiden University Library.

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It remains to thank the person who will most happy to see this thesis completed. To John who has cheerfully encouraged, sustained and chivvied me till the end - my thanks.

## ABBREVIATIONS

BEFEO	<i>Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient.</i>
BKI	<i>Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch- Indie.</i>
IG	<i>Indische Gids</i>
JAS	<i>Journal of Asian Studies</i>
JMBRAS	<i>Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSEAH	<i>Journal of Southeast Asian History.</i>
JSEAS	<i>Journal of Southeast Asian Studies.</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
OV	<i>Oudheidkundige Verslag.</i>
NBG	<i>Notulen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen</i>
SWK	<i>Sumatra's Westkust</i>
TAG	<i>Tijdschrift van het Koninklijk Nederlandsch Aardrijkskundige Genootschap</i>
TBB	<i>Tijdschrift voor het Binnenlandsch Bestuur</i>
TBG	<i>Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde.</i>
TNI	<i>Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indie</i>
VBG	<i>Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap</i>

## CHAPTER ONE

### "THE POOREST PRETENCE OF MONARCHS THE WORLD HAS KNOWN"

This thesis is concerned with a problem of interpretation in Indonesian history. It addresses the difficulty which observers - both contemporary European commentators and modern historians - have experienced in understanding and explaining to themselves the nature and role of Minangkabau royal authority in Sumatran history. The kings of Minangkabau have been described, on one hand, as "sacred rulers" still held in "religious veneration" by nineteenth century Malays<sup>1</sup>, but also as "powerless" rulers<sup>2</sup>, "Kings without soldiers: the poorest pretence of monarchs the world has known".<sup>3</sup>

For European observers from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries the puzzle of Minangkabau royal authority has crystallised around the issue of a royal "charisma" which has appeared to be unconnected with the practical elements of executive power. Observers have commented upon the "imagined holiness"<sup>4</sup> of the royal family among Malays, while also noting that they lacked wealth and the conventional attributes of royal authority. The eighteenth century Dutchman, J. L. van Basel, encapsulated this distinction with the observation that inhabitants of west Sumatra honoured the rulers of Minangkabau "more for their spiritual authority than

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<sup>1</sup> T.J. Newbold, *British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1971 (Reprinted from the first edition London, 1839) vol. II p. 216.

<sup>2</sup> H. Kroeskamp, *De Westkust en Minangkabau 1665-1668*, Academisch Proefschrift University of Leiden, 1919, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> E. M. Loeb, *Sumatra. Its History and People*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1972, reprinted from the Original 1935 publication, p. 102. The disjunction in the terms which Europeans have used to explain Minangkabau royal authority has been noticed by J. Kathirithamby-Wells, in "Myth and Reality", pp. 121-2.

<sup>4</sup> J.L. van Basel, "Begin en Voortgang van Onze Handel en Bezittingen op Sumatra's Westkust," *TNI*, vol.9, 2, (1847), p. 65.

for their worldly existence".<sup>5</sup> And, in the twentieth century, Winstedt made a similar point when he commented that,

While the rulers of Malay port kingdoms waxed rich on tolls and dues, it is perhaps significant that like the shaman (and the Khassi chief) a Yang di-pertuan of inland Minangkabau or Negri Sembilan had no source of income beyond the produce of the royal demesne and voluntary contributions for ceremonial functions.<sup>6</sup>

In the eighteenth century the well known historian of Sumatra, William Marsden, drew attention to what he saw as a discrepancy between the actual substance of Minangkabau royal authority and the status claimed by the Minangkabau kings.

Although their power and resources are not much beyond those of a common *raja*, they do not fail to assert all the ancient rights and prerogatives of the empire, which are not disputed as long as they are not attempted to be carried into force.<sup>7</sup>

Struggling to put this phenomenon in recognisable European terms, Marsden compared the position of the Minangkabau rulers with that of the Pope,

Their authority, in short, resembles not a little that of the sovereign pontiffs of Rome during the latter centuries, founded as it is in the superstition of remote ages; holding terrors over the weak, and contemned by the stronger powers.<sup>8</sup>

This was a parallel to which other Europeans would resort in attempting to understand Minangkabau royal authority, for, however insubstantial Minangkabau royal prestige appeared to Europeans, they also noted that it had a pervasive and ubiquitous presence in the archipelago.<sup>9</sup> As Newbold remarked in the first part of the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Winstedt, *The Malays a Cultural History*, London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., First published, 1947, Reprinted, 1972,, p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> W. Marsden, *The History of Sumatra, London, 1811 (first published 1783); reprinted Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 336.*

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, H.G. Nahuijs, *Brieven over Bencoolen, Padang, het Rijk van Menangkabau, Rhiouw, Sincapoera, en Poelo-Pinang*, Breda: F.B. Hollingerus Pijpers, 1826, p. 141.

nineteenth century, the Minangkabau kingdom was regarded by Malays as a fountainhead of Malay culture and civilization:

From the last [Minangkabau] the Malays derive their origin; laws, civil and criminal; mode of government as adapted for sovereigns, and their ministers...<sup>10</sup>

Marsden too commented that:

the country of *Menangkabau* is regarded as the supreme seat of civil and religious authority in this part of the East, and next to a voyage to Mecca, to have visited its metropolis, stamps a man learned, and confers the character of superior sanctity.<sup>11</sup>

In a similar vein the Scot, Alexander Hamilton, remarked in the eighteenth century upon the prestige of Minangkabaus within the archipelago,

Malays consider the Minangkabau to have the character of great sorcerers, who by their spells can tame wild tigers and make them carry them whither they order on their backs.<sup>12</sup>

The Kings of Minangkabau were themselves regarded with special awe as one of the founding families of Malay sovereignty. Like the rulers of Melaka they were considered to be descendants of Alexander the Great and the first ruler of Minangkabau was believed to have been one of the three princes who appeared on the sacred mountain of Bukit Seguntang.<sup>13</sup> Winstedt noticed that a sword used in the enthronement ceremony for the Sultan of Perak early in the twentieth century bore the name of the royal sword of Minangkabau, a weapon which is still kept in the Minangkabau highlands today.<sup>14</sup> And other items of regalia which are claimed to be

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<sup>10</sup> Newbold, *British Settlements*, pp. 215-6.

<sup>11</sup> Marsden, *History of Sumatra*, p. 343.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*, London: Argonaut Press, 1930 (first published Edinburgh, 1727), vol. 2 p. 45; cited in Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, London: Macmillan, 1982, p. 71.

<sup>13</sup> This is discussed in Chapter Nine below.

<sup>14</sup> R.O. Winstedt, "Kingship and Enthronement in Malaya", *JMBRAS*, vol. 20, 1, (1947), pp.131. See also F.D.K. Bosch, "De Rijkssieraden van Pagar Roejoeng", *OV*, (1930), Bilage E, pp. 202-215.

derived from the rulers of Minangkabau at Pagaruyung are still extant in the archipelago as far afield as the Celebes.<sup>15</sup>

Numerous royal dynasties in Sumatra trace their descent to the Minangkabau royal line. These include the rulers of Jambi, Inderapura and Moko-Moko, of Barus and Inderapura.<sup>16</sup> Sumatran groups, like the Rejang, possess legends which trace their descent to Pagaruyung and rajas in east Sumatran regions like Asahan, Panai and Siak also looked towards Minangkabau when they described their origins.<sup>17</sup> Further afield, rulers in Kedah, Sarawak and Brunei also traced their descent from the rulers of Minangkabau and in Bima it is remembered that Islam was brought from Minangkabau.<sup>18</sup>

So important was Minangkabau royal prestige in the archipelago that, according to Leonard Andaya's assessment, even the Paduka Raja of Johor, a highly

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<sup>15</sup> A *payung*, said to have come from Pagaruyung, exists in Bone today. Personal communication from Helen Jessup.

<sup>16</sup> Regarding Jambi see V.E. Korn, "De Oorsprong van het Djambische Rijk, het Rijkssieraad Si Goendjai en de Eendagsvorst", *Bingkisan Budi* (Leiden, 1950), pp. 170-187 and H.T. Damste, "Een Maleische Legende Omtrent de Afstamming der Vorsten van Djambi en de Geschiedenis der Oerang Koeboe", *TBB*, vol. 20 (1901), pp. 281-4. On Bengkulen and Moko-Moko and Inderapura see J.A.W. Ophuizen, "Iets over het ontstaan van eenige Regentschappen in de Assisident-Residentie Begkoelen", *TBG*, vol. XI (1862), p. 193; O.L. Helfrich, "De Adel van Bengkoelen en Djambi (1892-1901)", *Adatrechtbundels*, vol. 22 (1923), p. 310; *The Syair Mukomuko*, J. Kathirithamby-Wells and Muhammad Yusoff Hashim (eds.), Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS, 1985, p. 46; and J. Kathirithamby-Wells, "The Inderapura Sultanate: The Foundations of its rise and decline from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries", *Indonesia*, vol.21, (1976), pp. 65-85.

<sup>17</sup> On the Rejang see, J.J.J.M. Wuisman, *Sociale Verandering in Bengkulu: Een Cultuur-Sociologische Analyse*, Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1985, p. 7; and M.A. Jaspan, *From Patriliney to Matriliney. Structural Change among the Redjang of Southwest Sumatra*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 1964, pages 8, 25 and 282. East Sumatran links with Minangkabau are mentioned in W.H.M. Schadee, *Geschiedenis van Sumatra's Oostkust*, Amsterdam, 1918, vol. I, p. 110.

<sup>18</sup> See M. Naim, *Merantau: Minangkabau Voluntary Migration*, PhD Thesis, University of Singapore, 1973, p. 113 and H. Syamsuddin, "The Coming of Islam and the role of the Malays as middlemenon Bima", in H. Sutherland and G. Schutte (eds.), *Papers of the Dutch-Indonesian Historical Conference, June 1980*, Leiden and Jakarta: Bureau of Indonesian Studies, 1982, p. 296. Francis Light related that the Sultans of Kedah came originally from Minangkabau, Hendrik M.J. Maier, *In the Centre of Authority: The Malay Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, 1988, p. 15 and also pp. 92-3.

practical politician in the eighteenth century Malay world, used the "psychological, prestigious, and even the material support" of the Minangkabau kings in his war against Jambi.<sup>19</sup>

Marsden described the impact of Minangkabau kings in the British controlled territories of south west Sumatra in the late eighteenth century.

Their government, in the abstract, however insignificant in itself, is there [in distant parts] an object of veneration. Indeed to such an unaccountable excess is this carried, that every relative of the sacred family, and many who have no pretensions to it assume that character, are treated wherever they appear, not only with the most profound respect by the chiefs who go out to meet them, fire salutes on their entering the *dusuns*, and allow them to level contributions for their maintenance; but by the country people with such a degree of superstitious awe, that they submit to be insulted, plundered, and even wounded by them, without making resistance, which they would esteem a dangerous profanation. Their appropriate title ... is *Yang de per-tuan*, literally signifying 'he who ruleth'.<sup>20</sup>

Marsden had his own agenda. An eighteenth century man who espoused the "light of reason", he sought to establish a hierarchy of Sumatran peoples.<sup>21</sup> He was antagonistic to the superstition he perceived among Sumatran Malays which he appears to have associated with foreign influences.<sup>22</sup> His observations of the type of respect paid to Minangkabau royalty was, nevertheless, based upon his own experience and is typical of other first hand accounts which will be considered later. As Marsden recounts,

Some years ago when I was resident of *Manna*, there was a man who had long worked in the place as a *cooley*, when someone arrived from the northward, who happened to discover that he was a *lang de per-tuan* or relation of the imperial

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<sup>19</sup> L. Andaya, *The Kingdom of Johor*, p. 159.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp. 336-7.

<sup>21</sup> Marsden, *A History of Sumatra*, p. 206. Marsden's preoccupation with reason has been noticed by James A. Boon in *Affinities and Extremes*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1990, p. 33.

<sup>22</sup> Marsden, *A History of Sumatra*, pp. 41-2. See also Boon, *Affinities and Extremes*, pp. 30-4.



family. Immediately all the *bazaar* united to raise him to honour and independence; he was never suffered to walk without a high umbrella carried over him, was followed by numerous attendants, and addressed by the title of *tuanku*, equivalent to your highness. After this he became an intriguing, troublesome fellow in the Residency, and occasioned much annoyance. The prejudice in favour of these people is said to extend all over the islands to the eastward where the Malay tongue is spoken.<sup>23</sup>

Such a "prejudice" in favour of the rulers of Minangkabau certainly extended to the Batak regions of north Sumatra. There, Marsden wrote:

Notwithstanding the independent spirit of the Battas, and their contempt for all power that would affect a superiority over their little societies, they have a superstitious veneration for the Sultan of Menangkabau, and show a blind submission to his relations and emissaries, real or pretended, when such appear among them for the purpose of levying contributions: even when insulted and put in fear of their lives, they make no attempt at resistance: they think that their affairs would never prosper; that their *padi* would be blighted, and their buffaloes die; that they would remain under a kind of spell, for offending those sacred messengers."<sup>24</sup>

Indeed the rulers themselves claimed to have such abilities; in 1825 one Minangkabau ruler told a Dutchman that "he had the power to punish refractory *raja* in the *rantau* by causing failure of the rice crop or an epidemic among people or cattle."<sup>25</sup> In the early nineteenth century Burton and Ward found, during their expedition to Silindung, that the Bataks of Tapanuli would still submit to the ruler of Minangkabau.<sup>26</sup> Heine-Geldern has also commented upon Batak reverence for the Minangkabau rulers, referring in detail to Batak legends which cite the Raja of Barus as intermediary between the Toba Bataks, the Si Singa Mangaraja kings and the ruler of Minangkabau

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 337 footnote a.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 376.

<sup>25</sup> Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 119. In this quotation Dobbin cites an manuscript by van Zuylen van Nijeveld, *Een Nota en statistique bijzonderheden over Padang, c. 1825*.

<sup>26</sup> Burton and Ward, "Report of a Journey into the Batak Country in the Interior of Sumatra, in the year 1824", *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society*, I, (1827), p. 495.

to whom they paid tribute.<sup>27</sup>

Seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century observers, then, clearly noticed that the Minangkabau royal family had a special position in the Malay world with particular claims to royal prestige not only in Sumatra but also in the wider archipelago. More often than not, however, the same Europeans also noted that this authority was limited in its execution, in its "real" power or executive impact. This distinction, we will have occasion to notice, is one which is only made in European sources and never appears in surviving local works from the same period. In itself this fact should alert us to the existence of a disjunction in the terms used to describe political authority in Malay and European sources.

A further indication that something may have been askew in the way that Europeans approached the question of Minangkabau royal authority is the fact that it tended to give rise to a certain irritation on the part of these observers. Edwin Loeb, who wrote in the twentieth century and who, unlike earlier Dutch officials, never actually had anything to do with the Minangkabau kings, described them as "mere figureheads".<sup>28</sup> Targets for particular European scorn were the royal credentials and titles adopted by the Minangkabau kings and articulated in letters and edicts from the court. E.B. Kielstra remarked, late in the nineteenth century, that Dutchmen in earlier times had considered the "Emperor of Minangkabau" to be a person of great power and authority and this was perhaps due to the elevated titles which he assumed in his letters. Kielstra quotes with approval the eighteenth century judgement of van Basel

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<sup>27</sup> R. Heine-Geldern, "Le Pays de Pi-k'ien, Le Roi au Grand Cou et Le Singa Mangaradja", *BEFEO*, 49 (1959), p. 25 onwards.

<sup>28</sup> Loeb, *Sumatra*, p. 102.

who considered these same titles to be quite "nauseating".<sup>29</sup> Marsden, too, thought that, "The titles and epithets assumed by the Sultans are the most extravagantly absurd that it is possible to imagine".<sup>30</sup> The elevated titles and lordly powers claimed by the Minangkabau kings have frequently been juxtaposed by Europeans with their own "real power" concerns and have encouraged them to conclude that "the authority of the Minangkabau kings was utterly fictional".<sup>31</sup>

A factor which undoubtedly influenced nineteenth century Dutch writers who described the insignificance of the Minangkabau kings was the armed attack launched on the royal family by Padri reformers at a meeting in 1815. Many members of the royal house were killed and others fled from the highlands. The old royal centres at Pagaruyung and Suruaso were destroyed by fire.<sup>32</sup> When nineteenth century commentators described the situation of the remaining princes in the 1820's they saw a ruined kingdom. The Padris, as Nahuijs commented, had "showed the Malays how powerless they [the kings] were".<sup>33</sup> Although this helps to explain the attitude of nineteenth century Dutch observers to Minangkabau kingship, a question posed by S.M. Latif in 1924 remains unanswered. Why, if they were as powerless as eighteenth century writers, like Marsden suggested, was it necessary for the Padris to eliminate the royal family? Latif pointed to the general confusion in European literature

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<sup>29</sup> "Waarvan van Basel - niet ten onrechte - schreeft 'dat men er van walgen moeste'", E.B. Kielstra, "Onze Kennis", p.502. Van Basel's original statement can be found in his *Radicaale Beschrijving van Sumatra's Westkust*, (1761) Paragraph 30. This is also cited by Bosch, "De Rijkssieraden van Pagar Roejoeng", p. 202.

<sup>30</sup> Marsden, *The History of Sumatra*, pp. 340-41.

<sup>31</sup> J. Pauw "De Hoofden in De Kwantan (1918)", *Adatrechtbundels*, vol. 27 (1928), p. 393.

<sup>32</sup> The best description of these events in English is that of Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 137.

<sup>33</sup> Nahuijs, *Brieven over Bencoolen, Padang, het Rijk van Menangkabau*, p. 143.

concerning the place of kingship in Minangkabau society.<sup>34</sup>

Modern historians and anthropologists have left behind the exasperation which the enlightened men of the eighteenth century felt for the rhetorically inclined Minangkabau kings. Rather, the tendency in much recent writing is to see the sacred or magical attributes of Minangkabau royal prestige as having symbolic significance. The most important analysis of Minangkabau royal authority to have been undertaken in the twentieth century is that of the Dutch structural anthropologist P.E. de Josselin de Jong. De Josselin de Jong sought to identify an underlying system which would make sense of what was known about Minangkabau society and to trace an "ideal pattern" of social and political life in Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan.<sup>35</sup> Kingship, he argued had a vital unifying role in a society which was divided by phratry allegiance (*laras*), *suku* divisions and territorial domains (*luhak*). His study emphasises competition between the two Minangkabau *laras*, or *adat* traditions, and De Josselin de Jong saw the royal house as representing a third party which combined and unified society. The ruler had the "function of unifying, of almost literally incorporating all his territories" de Josselin de Jong argued.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, in a matrilineal society, he suggested, "the essential function and position of the Minangkabau ruler was as representative of the patrilineal, male, principle which enters into combinations with the matrilineal, female principle as expressed by Minangkabau social structure".<sup>37</sup> Thus, he concluded, "the Jangdipatuan's duties were mainly of a sacred nature. He

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<sup>34</sup> S.M. Latif, "De Positie en de Macht van Jang Di Patoean, Vorst van Minangkabau en zijne Nakomelingen", *Vrijzinnig Weekblad*, No. 7 (1924), pp. 516-9.

<sup>35</sup> P.E. De Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan. Socio-Political Structure in Indonesia*, (First Published in 1952) Reprinted Jakarta: Bhratara, 1960. For the author's own description of his method see Chapter 1.

<sup>36</sup> De Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan*, p. 108.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 101.

imparted his *daulat* [the essence of his sovereignty] to the country and embodied the unity of the Minangkabau World as a whole."<sup>38</sup>

De Josselin de Jong's conclusions, which will be considered in more detail below, have significance for subsequent work on Minangkabau society. Tsuyoshi Kato, for instance, acknowledges de Josselin de Jong's analysis in himself referring to the symbolic role of the raja as unifier of the Alam Minangkabau.<sup>39</sup> He agrees that "The kingship demarcated, defined and possibly defended the contour and sphere of the Minangkabau World. In this 'superstitious veneration' of the raja was the major factor, not an organized bureaucracy nor an army."<sup>40</sup>

While the "symbolic" importance of the Minangkabau royal family is thus now recognised in modern publications, de Josselin de Jong's important conclusions have nevertheless had little impact upon the way in which past political life in Minangkabau is viewed by western scholars. The symbolic or sacred role of kingship is still treated as having had marginal importance in the political history of the kingdom; it is treated, in Mark Hobart's phrase, as a "residual category" in Minangkabau history.<sup>41</sup> Royal authority is seen to have had little impact on those "real" issues of power and politics with which European writers are concerned and, with some exceptions, contemporary authors have tended to perpetuate the distinction between

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 110-11. Also quoted by Tsuyoshi Kato in *Matriliny and Migration. Evolving Minangkabau Traditions in Indonesia*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982, p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> Kato, *Matriliny and Migration*, p. 40. De Josselin de Jong, himself, only used the term "symbol of unity" on one occasion, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan*, p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Kato, *Matriliny and Migration*, p. 41.

<sup>41</sup> Mark Hobart, "Introduction: Context, Meaning and Power" in Mark Hobart and Robert H. Taylor (eds.), *Context Meaning and Power in Southeast Asia*, Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, 1986, p. 9.

"real" and "imagined" authority which characterised earlier writing on the subject.<sup>42</sup>

Kato, therefore, suggests that, despite his "symbolic role", "The political and economic importance of the Minangkabau raja is in doubt";<sup>43</sup> and that

There are many indications that the king did not wield any real political power over much of the area in the Alam Minangkabau, nor over the villages of the darek.<sup>44</sup>

Christine Dobbin describes Minangkabau royal prestige as having a "sacral character".<sup>45</sup> The Minangkabau royal family, Dobbin suggests, advanced "considerable claims" despite their "lack of effective authority"<sup>46</sup>

The present study sets out to reconsider the assumptions about "real power" which western scholars have applied to their understanding of kingship in Minangkabau. In particular it will be argued that the relegation of "symbolic" authority to a "residual" role, outside the ambit of "real" power concerns, inhibits our understanding of the role of kingship in Minangkabau history. As de Josselin de Jong himself remarked, the idea that the Minangkabau kings were useless decorations, or "*rois fainéants*", "is based on the application of too exclusively European norms."<sup>47</sup> Yet it is European sources, based upon European norms, which have informed most of the existing academic analyses of Minangkabau royal authority.

The separation between real and titular authority has its origins, I will argue, in European thought of the seventeenth century. A careful reading of seventeenth

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<sup>42</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells suggests that "Though exercising no effective political force", the "residual functions" of the Minangkabau ruler may have had a "crucial" role in the Minangkabau world, especially in the late seventeenth century. "Myth and Reality", pp. 121-141.

<sup>43</sup> Kato, *Matriliny and Migration*, p. 40.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>45</sup> Dobbin, "The Exercise of Authority", p. 79 and *Islamic Revivalism*, pages 65 and 118-9.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>47</sup> De Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan*, p. 107.

century Dutch statements about Minangkabau sovereignty reveals that the distinctions made between titular and real authority illustrated in the scattered published sources cited above, is more than a random phenomenon. On the contrary, the "word vs deed" paradigm represents a consistent European response which can be traced to the earliest seventeenth century contact with Minangkabau. It is only by acknowledging this paradigm, and using it as a critical tool, that we may come to appreciate the importance of words, of rhetoric and honorifics, in Minangkabau ideas about authority and to integrate this into an understanding of Minangkabau kingship in Sumatran history.

The thesis takes as its subject, therefore, not only the historical role of Minangkabau kings in Sumatran history, but also the way in which that role has been described by European observers from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. The European sources are read not just for what they can tell us about Minangkabau, but also for what they reveal about the conceptual framework within which Europeans made their judgments about local polities. By approaching the subject as a case study in cross-cultural perceptions at a critical time in the European penetration of Southeast Asia it may be possible to illuminate the "problem" which Europeans have experienced in understanding Minangkabau kingship.

De Josselin de Jong has provided us with a model of symbolic power, but that model was based, largely, on later nineteenth century sources. For historians the problem remains of understanding how that model might have worked in historical process. As Kato has noted, "Together with its historical inception, the nature and function of Minangkabau kingship ought to be an important topic of historical studies in the future".<sup>48</sup> Yet for specialists on Indonesian history, the dearth of local sources prior to the nineteenth century has always obstructed a more thorough examination of

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<sup>48</sup> Kato, *Matriliny and Migration*, p. 39, n.8.

Minangkabau royal authority. Here an attempt has been made to overcome the problem by bringing together two groups of superficially incompatible sources.

The study targets the very feature of royal discourse which has attracted the most scorn from European observers, the letters and credentials of the ruler. A corpus of nineteenth century Malay letters from the kings of Minangkabau has been identified. Many of these are decorative and fragile manuscripts. They are kept in museum collections, in the homes of descendants of the outlying royal courts in Sumatra and in the old royal centre at Pagaruyung. These letters are subjected to a close reading and compared with a large body of similar letters sent by Minangkabau kings to the VOC from the 1660's to the 1740's which are preserved in Dutch translation in the VOC archives. Read in the context of seventeenth and eighteenth century developments in east and west Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula, these letters afford new insights into the nature and role of Minangkabau kingship in one period of Sumatran history. In particular they encourage us to look carefully at rhetoric and to take the language of sovereignty more seriously than did the colonial historians. Language, we shall see, was integral to the meaning of kingship in the Minangkabau world.

A second line of attack is the Dutch archive itself. The manuscript reports sent by Company officials from west Sumatra to Batavia in the seventeenth and eighteenth century have not been subjected to sustained critical scrutiny by anyone focussing on Minangkabau kingship.<sup>49</sup> The VOC came into close contact with the Minangkabau kingdom from their base at Padang in west Sumatra and the narrative core of this thesis traces that relationship in the period between 1665 and 1740. The Dutch came to Sumatra to trade and they quickly entangled themselves in local life. Their preconceptions were formed in a very different world from that of the peoples they

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<sup>49</sup> Appendix One contains a summary of existing work on the Dutch in west Sumatra.



describe and we, who read the archive, are distanced from the participants and their meeting by both time and culture. It is essential, therefore, to acknowledge the complexity of the encounter, and the conditions under which Dutch reports were generated.

Following, as it does, the steps of European intruders into the coastal world of Sumatra, the thesis is conceived as a journey inwards towards the centre and towards local voices which are rarely heard.

Chapter Two looks at the period before the Dutch arrived in west Sumatra. First, it considers the early history of Minangkabau, comparing the perceptions of colonial writers with what modern historians actually know about the early Minangkabau kingdom. It turns then to examine the way in which the Europeans perceived the inland kingdom when they first arrived in Southeast Asian waters and encircled the island in search of gold. These perceptions, we discover, were influenced by what Europeans hoped to find, but they also offer us some clues as to the shape of the Minangkabau kingdom in the sixteenth century.

Although Dutch merchants grasped the exciting idea of a gold-rich kingdom in the centre of Sumatra in the early seventeenth century, it was not until the 1660s that they came into real contact with Minangkabau kings. West Sumatra was the site of this engagement and letters sent to Batavia from VOC officials stationed there provide a source of sustained reporting on Dutch activities, and Dutch perceptions of the local scene, into the eighteenth century. Chapter Three looks at the terms in which European and Sumatrans interacted on the Sumatran shore in the early 1660's; its subject is encounter and the expectations which the parties brought to that encounter. We examine both the west Sumatran coastal world and that of the Dutch East India Company and the cultural perspectives of each.

Chapter Four investigates in detail the first Dutch communications with the

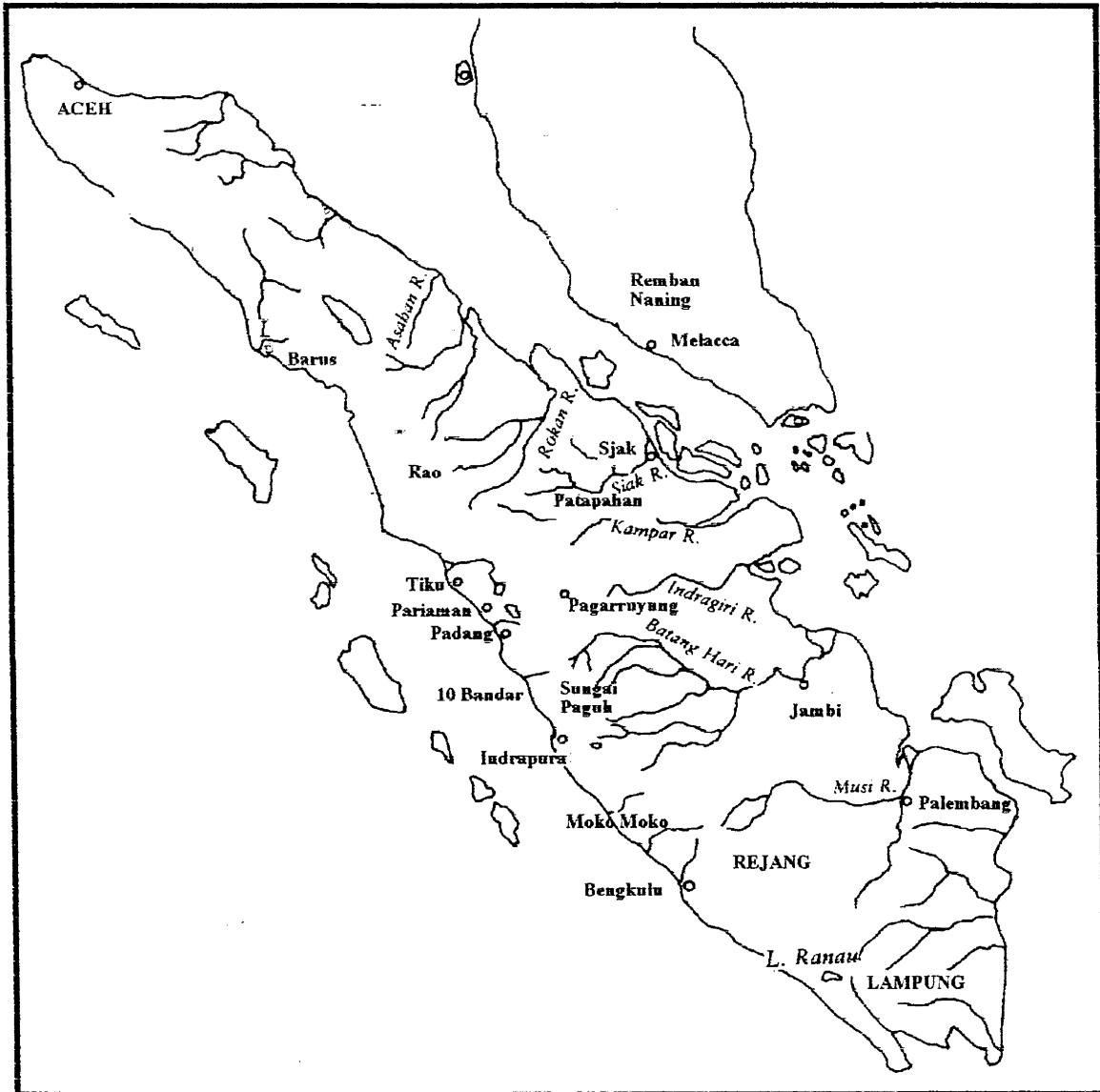
interior of the island and the Minangkabau ruler who, they thought, might help them to gain access to the gold. These took place between 1665-7. What emerges from them is a tale of ambiguity as political actors on the west coast, the Dutch among them, sought to use the ruler's name for their own purposes. Delegation, we discover, was an essential component of Minangkabau political life, but one which appears to have been understood differently by Dutchmen and by local leaders.

Chapter Five interrupts the chronology of events by turning to examine what Dutch sources reveal about the position of the Minangkabau rulers in the interior of the island. The records contain two remarkable accounts of embassies sent inland by the VOC to visit the ruler. These descriptions of the inland kingdom suggest the need to reassess certain conceptions and problems surrounding the Minangkabau kingdom which have implications for any analysis of its authority.

Chapter Six returns to the coastal world of west Sumatra and examines the relationship between the inland court and the *rantau* (or frontier) between 1668 and 1690. We take up again the theme of delegation and explore the way in which Minangkabau kings communicated with the coastal regions through royal letters which were requested by coastal leaders who wished to empower themselves against the VOC. The language of a developing Dutch discourse concerning the powerlessness of the Minangkabau kings reveals how threatened Company servants began to feel by these royal letters and by a type of royal rhetoric which, at the same time, they scorned.

Having identified the important role of letters in west coast society, Chapter Seven turns to consider what these local utterances were like. The chapter establishes that letters from the Minangkabau court were a distinct form, a genre, of Malay writing. The physical appearance, literary style and actual contents of these letters varied little from letter to letter or over time. Rather than containing new messages,

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MAP ONE

as such, it is suggested that the letters were a vehicle for transmitting a consistent set of statements about royal authority.

After establishing the significance, indeed the peculiar potency, of these letters, or mandates, as the Dutch called them, Chapter Eight concentrates on the question of mechanism, postponing an analysis of what the letters actually say. We look at how the letters worked as what might be termed political tools in coastal society. This chapter investigates the means by which Minangkabau princes provided leadership in a series of anti-VOC rebellions which spread through the archipelago in the late seventeenth century. This leads to a discussion of the "authority of the sign" in seventeenth century Malay society and, in Chapter Nine, of the way in which letters, signs and princely delegates emanating from the Minangkabau court could act as a medium for transmitting royal powers to the scattered communities of the Minangkabau frontier.

Chapter Ten turns, finally, to the language of Minangkabau authority, to the words which were transmitted to Sumatran communities in royal letters. By probing the context and meaning of this language we develop a picture of the benefits which Minangkabau kings offered to their scattered subjects and the meaning of Minangkabau sovereignty in the coastal regions of Sumatra.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE EUROPEAN SEARCH FOR AN "EMPEROR" OF MINANGKABAU: ENCIRCLING SUMATRA

In their judgments concerning the relative importance and power of the Minangkabau kingdom some European writers have explained the respect shown to the rulers by reference to the former glory of the kingdom, to past times before their own experience. This chapter will examine the Minangkabau past from various angles. We shall explore the conclusions of archaeologists and epigraphers concerning early Minangkabau history as well as the perceptions of Portuguese and Dutch merchants who encircled the island before the 1660's. Eighteenth and nineteenth century writers did not have the benefit of these assembled sources when they described the Minangkabau kingdom. Rather, they imagined a former glory on the basis of what they regarded as fragmentary remains. This has been an influential view. The idea that Minangkabau must, once, have been a great and powerful kingdom has influenced most writing on the subject and it will be as well to examine the implications of this view before we proceed.

#### A Shadow of Homage

In a description of west Sumatra which was written in 1761 J.L. van Basel referred to the "formerly so celebrated kingdom of Minangkabau".<sup>1</sup> The British writer William Marsden also thought in terms of former greatness. In 1780's he described

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<sup>1</sup> *Radicaale Beschrijving van Sumatra's Westkust*, (1761) Arsip Negara, Republic of Indonesia SWK 10, Paragraph 30. For later versions of this view see Nahuijs, *Brieven over Bencoolen, Padang, het Rijk van Menangkabau*, pp. 138-9 and Kielstra (following van Basel and Marsden), E.B. Kielstra, "Onze Kennis van Sumatra's Westkust, omstreeks de helfd der Achttiende Eeuw", BKI, vol. 36, (1887), pp.502.

Minangkabau as

the principal sovereignty of the island, which formerly comprehended the whole, and still receives a shadow of homage from the most powerful of the other kingdoms, which have sprung up from its ruins...<sup>2</sup>

Indeed this view is most clearly expressed by British writers of the Enlightenment.<sup>3</sup>

Newbold, for example, remarked that the Minangkabau kingdom

flourished for a considerable length of time in great splendour; and the religious veneration in which it is held at the present day by Malays...certainly indicate[s] a high comparative state of former civilization.<sup>4</sup>

Raffles took the most romantic view of Minangkabau. He visited the burnt out court in 1818, saw what he described as "kawi" inscriptions there, and suggested that this was the original Malay kingdom; "the source of that power, the origin of that nation, so extensively scattered over the Eastern Archipelago."<sup>5</sup>

At no very distant date the sovereignty of Menangkabau was acknowledged over the whole of Sumatra, and its influence extended to many neighbouring Islands; the respect still paid to its princes by all ranks, amounts almost to veneration. By upholding their authority, a central government may easily be established; and the numerous petty states, now disunited and barbarous, may be again connected under one general system of government.<sup>6</sup>

In these few scattered quotations we hear of a splendid ancient kingdom which was still venerated and which once held Sumatra, and indeed the Malays, in one system of government. One of the most obvious problems with the "former glory" scenario

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<sup>2</sup> Marsden, *A History of Sumatra*, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Although it also influenced later, twentieth century perspectives. According to H. Kroeskamp the idea of Minangkabau authority, in west Sumatra, rested on "time honoured traditions from a misty past". Kroeskamp, H. *De Westkust en Minangkabau 1665-1668*, Academisch Proefschrift University of Leiden, 1919, p. 110.

<sup>4</sup> Newbold, *British Settlements*, II, pp. 216.

<sup>5</sup> Raffles, S. (ed.), *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, London: James Duncan, 1835, vol. 1, p. 426.

<sup>6</sup> Raffles, *Memoir of the Life*, p. 426 and pp. 432-3. Raffles, of course, was anxious to convince his correspondent, in this case the Duchess of Somerset, and others at home of the wisdom of retaining the former Dutch sphere. Raffles refers to the Hindu remains he found at Pagaruyung and Suruaso on pages, 388, 423 and 426 of the memoir which was published by lady Raffles after his death.

illustrated above is that very little is known with certainty about the early history of the kingdom and it is difficult to identify a time when Minangkabau kings did clearly enjoy the type of power which Europeans appear to have expected. Having little to say about early Minangkabau history these authors sought to explain Minangkabau royal prestige by referring an "ancient kingdom" about which they had no information.<sup>7</sup>

Later, nineteenth century Dutch research into the inscriptions which Raffles came upon in Pagaruyung and Suruaso revealed that the first king of Minangkabau was Adityawarman who reigned from approximately 1347-1375. The inscriptions give the impression that Adityawarman was a vigorous king. Little information is available about his immediate successors, however, and, on the basis of later Minangkabau traditions, historians have suggested that kingship became just one strand in the complex fabric of Minangkabau society. The subtle nature of this proposal and the problems of evidence it involves were not part of the enlightenment view. On the contrary, the writers cited here had never heard of Adityawarman. Their perspective depended upon a type of "central system of government" which was consonant with European expectations, but which had little to do with the actual evidence for Sumatran history. As far as these writers were concerned the splendid early kingdom they imagined was based on conjecture and the notion of decline followed from that conjecture.<sup>8</sup> Whatever veneration and homage remained was left over from a "former civilization". In this way the entire history of Minangkabau kingship between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries is characterized by a condition of decline.

It is difficult to accept that four centuries of continued "veneration" for the royal

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<sup>7</sup> Marsden, *History of Sumatra*, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> I owe this point to Mary Quilty whose recent thesis on British orientalist writing identifies the way in which Marsden, Raffles and Crawford used "conjectural histories" to categorise the societies they described. M. C. Quilty, *Textual Empires: A Reading of Early British Histories of Southeast Asia*, Unpublished MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1992, Chapter Two.

presence in Minangkabau can be explained merely as a hang-over from one energetic reign. A continuing reverence lasting over four hundred years must have had, in its own way, a current relevance at each point of that period. If one acknowledges that the "essence of culture is process"<sup>9</sup> and that cultural expressions are always embedded in a complex web of time and context, then notions of cultural residue have little explanatory force. It may be necessary, therefore, to think more carefully about the "current relevance" of Minangkabau kingship in Minangkabau history after Adityawarman and about the role of the past in this relevance.

A related difficulty is the suggestion, implicit in the "hangover" view, that the continued "homage" surrounding the Minangkabau royal house was, necessarily, only a "shadow" of something else more real. Marsden, we know, saw examples of this homage during his time in Sumatra. It was also evident in the way that local rulers in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula traced their descent to the Minangkabau royal house. We might say that Marsden and others were aware of a certain amount of contemporary "cultural noise" surrounding Minangkabau kingship and they sought to explain this by reference to a distant recollection. This raises questions about memory and the construction of meaning in Sumatran history. If vestiges of past glory were what motivated Sumatran rulers to associate themselves with Minangkabau, why was it Minangkabau they remembered and not the other kingdoms? Moreover, to what extent should any live cultural expression, be regarded as a shadow of something else? These are questions which we may seek to answer by concentrating, not on past glories, but on the way that Sumatrans lived their history.

It will be part of the thesis proposed here that certain, local, understandings of the past were central to the role and local meaning of Minangkabau kingship. These

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<sup>9</sup> Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches. Discourse on a Silent Land: The Marquesas 1774-1880*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980, p. 39.



understandings, it will be argued, had a present relevance in seventeenth and eighteenth century Sumatran society. To begin to probe those understandings some attention must first be given to what is known and what is knowable about the Minangkabau past.

### Adityawarman's Kingdom

Kingship was probably a late arrival in Minangkabau and there is little evidence about the character of political organization in the region before the fourteenth century. Major features of Minangkabau social life - such as lineage organization, local government by lineage elders, or *panghulu*, matrilineal residence and a system of descent reckoned through women - were all probably in place before Adityawarman established a kingdom inland.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike the coastal kingdoms of the Malay archipelago, Minangkabau was hidden from the eyes of early travellers. The typical Malay polity was situated upon a *kuala*, or river mouth, where control over the flow of goods up and down stream was often possible. Well known Malay kingdoms such as Srivijaya and Melaka were situated on the coast and prospered through attracting foreign merchants and acting as entrepôt centres. Their subjects were drawn to the court by the material, cultural and spiritual advantages to be gained in service to a raja. Forceful kingdoms like Aceh and Banten managed to dominate in a different fashion and to hold subject areas by military force.

Minangkabau functioned in a different way largely because of its geography. Located in the interior of the island, the region was not reliant upon attracting

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<sup>10</sup> D.S. Sjaifiroeddin, "Pre-Islamic Minangkabau", *Sumatra Research Bulletin*, vol. 4 (1974), pp. 31-57. For a discussion of the possible influence of south Indian merchants see Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 61-2.

merchants and subjects. Rather, Minangkabau depended upon a settled agricultural base and the exploitation of the region's gold supplies. Goods were sent out to the periphery for sale rather than drawn in towards the centre, as in the *entrepôt* model, and royal authority, too, it will be argued, radiated outwards towards the periphery in a fashion that differed from other Malay kingdoms. At first glance, indeed, it might seem that the Minangkabau realm had more in common with the Javanese examples of Majapahit and Mataram. But Minangkabau differed from these too in that, unlike them, it lacked a hierarchical territorial bureaucratic structure and a developed military power. Moreover it is possible to suggest that the role of kingship in the Minangkabau sphere varied depending upon which part of the island is under consideration. The royal role, that is to say, differed to some extent depending upon whether one is examining the interior, or the intermediate frontier, or the coastal regions.

Gold was found in alluvial deposits in the highland plateau known as Tanah Datar and also in the rivers which flowed from the mountains towards the east coast.<sup>11</sup> Situated high in the Barisan mountain range Minangkabau was protected from outside intrusion and also blessed with access to both the east and west coasts of Sumatra. In these circumstances a particularly close relationship developed over time between the inland core of the Alam Minangkabau, known as the *darat*, and the outer regions in the intermediate interior and the coast, called the *rantau*.

Although Minangkabau, as such, was not mentioned by foreign travellers before the early fifteenth century, it was probably Minangkabau gold which earned Sumatra

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<sup>11</sup> The Minangkabau divide the inland region of the Alam Minangkabau, known as the *darat* into three *luhak* (or districts). These are Tanah Datar, Agam, and Limapuluh Kota. A more extensive discussion of discussion of the whereabouts, extraction and marketing of Minangkabau gold can be found in Dobbin *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 19-27 and *passim*. See also P.D. Rueb, P. D. *Het Westsumatraansche Goud Handel en Exploitatie in de Zeventiende Eeuw*, Unpublished thesis, University of Leiden, 1989.

the old Sanskrit names Suvarnavīpa (Island of Gold) and Suvarnabhūmi (Land of Gold).<sup>12</sup> Between the seventh and the eleventh centuries this wealth in gold was associated with the Śailendra kingdom of Srivijaya. The ruler was known as Maharaja of Suvarnavīpa and, according to Arab writers, he had so much gold that on each day of his reign a golden brick was thrown into a lagoon in front of his audience hall.<sup>13</sup> The Maharaja's authority is known to have encompassed a wide region, across the Straits of Melaka and inland over Sumatra. The complex of river systems stretching deep into the Barisan mountains must have provided Srivijaya with access to Minangkabau gold. The kingdom has been characterised as a network of riverine settlements linked by trading imperatives and by the spiritual prowess of the ruler.<sup>14</sup>

Between the seventh and the eleventh centuries Srivijaya's capital lay at Palembang, near the mouth of the Musi river, but by the eleventh century Palembang was in decline and the centre of authority moved to Malayu, in the region of modern Jambi.<sup>15</sup> For a variety of reasons, the Melaka Straits had become a less favourable environment. The extensive Batang Hari river system gave Malayu a deeper access into the interior and possibly also a route to the west coast by way of the

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<sup>12</sup> These names were used for several parts of Southeast Asia, but they were also particularly associated with Sumatra. See G. Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968, p.92. In the seventh century I-Tsing also called Sumatra the "gold Island", O.W. Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967, pages 23, 32 and 267.

<sup>13</sup> Coedès, *Indianized States*, p.109. The description of the ruler of Zābag comes from Abū Zaid (c. 916 A.D.), cited in G. R. Tibbetts, *A Study of the Arabic Texts Containing Material on Southeast Asia*, Leiden and London: E. J. Brill, 1979, pp. 32-4.

<sup>14</sup> O. W. Wolters, "Studying Srivijaya", *JMBRAS*, vol.52, 2, (1979), pp. 17-21. On the pattern of riverine and overland paths linking central Sumatra to the east coast see Akira Oki, "The River Trade in Central and South Sumatra in the 19th Century", *Environment, Agriculture and Society in the Malay World*, edited by T. Kato, Muchtar Lufti and Narifumi Maeda, Kyoto: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1986, pp. 3-48.

<sup>15</sup> O. W. Wolters, "A Note on the Capital of Śrīvijaya during the eleventh century", *Essays offered to G. H. Luce, Artibus Asiae*, I, (1966) pp. 225-39. Malayu was not a new kingdom; indeed it was mentioned by Chinese travellers as early as the seventh century, but it appears to have been assimilated within Srivijaya. Coedès, *Indianized States*, p. 79

Minangkabau highlands.<sup>16</sup>

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Malayu was also favoured by closer relations with Java than Palembang had enjoyed. In 1286 A.D. the Javanese king Kertanagara sent an inscribed Amoghapāśa-lokeśvara image to the king and the subjects of Malayupura.<sup>17</sup> The inscription was written in Old Malay, rather than Javanese, which tends to suggest a friendly intent and the country was described as Suvarṇabhūmi indicating that the Malay overlords retained their old association with the gold lands.<sup>18</sup>

For Malay and Minangkabau history the continuities of this story are important. Malayu is much less well established than Srivijaya in the scholarly literature and the contribution it made to the traditions which helped shape Malay identity is uncertain, although the name itself is suggestive.<sup>19</sup> Although it is often assumed that Malayu was less important than Srivijaya and, later, Melaka, a recent contribution suggests that the Malayu phase of Sumatran-Malay history was a significant one for the development of Minangkabau, and even Melakan, traditions of

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<sup>16</sup> Wolters suggests that the toponym "Malayu" may always have referred to a partly hinterland context, "Studying Srivijaya", p. 23. The most important reason for Palembang's demise appears to have been the interruption in the Chinese tributary trade which took place when Chinese ships began to be used for the importation of foreign goods. The end of this period coincided with the rise of Melaka as entrepôt trade once again became important. The expansion of the Thai and their aggressive stance in the south also made the straits less secure. More specifically Palembang was also subject to attacks from Cola and Javanese fleets. For a thorough discussion see O. W. Wolters, *The Fall of Srivijaya in Malay History*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970.

<sup>17</sup> Coedès, *Indianized States*, p. 201 and N. J. Krom, *Hindoe-Javaansche Geschiedenis*, 's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1931, pp.335-6. Amoghapāśa is one of the forms of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., and J.G. de Casparis, "Srivijaya and Malayu", in *Final Report, SPAFA Consultative Workshop on Archaeological and Environmental Studies on Srivijaya*, Bangkok: SPAFA, 1985, pp. 245-255.

<sup>19</sup> See Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, especially Chapter Six. There is, for example, no entry under "Malayu" in the index to the recently published Cambridge History of Southeast Asia.

kingship.<sup>20</sup>

In the mid-fourteenth century the Amoghapāśa-lokeśvara with its important inscription, marking recognition of Malayu by the Javanese ruler, was taken inland to Rambahan on the headwaters of the Batang Hari by Adityawarman who rededicated the image with an inscription of his own dated 1347 A.D..<sup>21</sup> This is the first evidence we have of Adityawarman's move to transfer the Malayu capital from the coastal regions to the interior of the island. The sources suggest that Adityawarman was a member of the Malayu royal family, who also had ties with Majapahit and spent part of his youth in east Java.<sup>22</sup> Moving the Malayu inscription, therefore, was probably a significant ritual act for Adityawarman and a way of displaying the power of his connections as well as pointing to the importance of his own reign.

Adityawarman referred to his realm as Suvarnadvīpa and to himself as "Sovereign of the Land of Gold" (*kanakamedinīndra*).<sup>23</sup> Despite his Javanese associations the inscriptions which this ruler left in the Minangkabau highlands indicate that he recognised no other king. He used the title Sri Maharajadiraja

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<sup>20</sup> Professor de Casparis emphasises the continuities of Malayu-Srivijaya-Malayu-Melaka in the article cited in note 19 above. Continuities between Malayu and Minangkabau will be considered in more detail in Chapter Ten below.

<sup>21</sup> H. Kern "De Wij-inscriptie op het Amoghapaca-beeld van Padang Candi (Midden-Sumatra) 1269 caka", in *Verspreide Geschriften*, vol. 7 's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1917, pp. 165-75. The image is illustrated in F. M. Schnitger, *Forgotten Kingdoms in Sumatra*, Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1964, Plate IV.

<sup>22</sup> De Casparis, "Srivijaya and Malayu", pp. 6-8 and Suleiman, *Archaeology and History*, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> The information that *Suvarnadvīpa* is mentioned in the large inscription at Pagaruyung comes from Dra Suleiman, an archaeologist who has examined the Minangkabau inscriptions in recent years (*Archaeology and History*, p.4). The name does not appear in Kern's nineteenth century transcription (H. Kern, "Nog iets over 't opschrift van Pagarruyung in Menangkabau (1278 Çāka), *BKI*, vol. 8 (1873), pp. 267-75. The name *Kanakamedinindra* is used on an inscription at Kuburajo, which, Dra Suleiman points out, was probably the royal palace, not Adityawarman's grave site as Dutch authors assumed. See H. Kern "Het Sanskrit-inschrift op den grafsteen van Vorst Adityawarman te Kubur Raja (Menangkabau; +1300 Çāka), *BKI*, vol. 67, (1913), p. 217 and Suleiman, *Archaeology and History*, p. 5.

meaning "great lord of rulers" and it was stated that his "dominion is absolute".<sup>24</sup> What this dominion involved is not entirely clear. A Patih, or minister, is mentioned in the 1347 inscription and this and other lords may have dealt with the practicalities of controlling the gold trade and ensuring that the ruler's orders were obeyed.<sup>25</sup>

Most of the inscriptions from this reign which have been deciphered emphasise the ruler's spiritual prowess and the benefits which flowed to his subjects from his pursuit of knowledge and enlightenment. The inscriptions reveal that Adityawarman was a devotee of a syncretic form of Siva-Buddhism, known as Kalakakra, which was also practised by Javanese kings in the same period and is thought to have been brought from Tibet by the Mongol rulers.<sup>26</sup> Kalacakra rites involve demonic sacrifices and the ritual partnership of a Bhairawa (an emanation of Siva) and his Sakti who aim at achieving the highest truth and non-duality through the union of their bodies. Adityawarman's portrait is probably represented in a huge Bhairawa statue found at Sungai Langsat in the headwaters of the Batang Hari. The figure, which has many features in common with the art of Singosari, stands upon a pedestal of skulls. It holds a sacrificial knife and a miniature Bodhisattva figure sits in his headdress [Plate 2].<sup>27</sup>

Kings like Adityawarman and Kertanagara, who advertised the energy of their spiritual exercises in inscriptions and statuary in this way were probably considered to

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<sup>24</sup> Kern, "Nog iets", p. 273.

<sup>25</sup> H. Kern "De Wij-inscriptie", p. 169. See Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 62 for one plausible scenario.

<sup>26</sup> The religious content of Adityawarman's inscriptions is discussed in most detail by J. L. Moens, "Het Buddhisme op Java en Sumatra in zijn laatste Bloeiperiode", *TBG*, vol. LXIV (1924), pp. 521-577. This article examines expressions of Tantric Buddhist belief in Java and Sumatra in the fourteenth century and compares Adityawarman with king Kertanagara of Majapahit.

<sup>27</sup> The figure now stands at the entrance to the courtyard of the National Museum in Jakarta. For an illustration of a *Bhairawa* figure from Singosari see Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 80. A commentary on the iconography of the statue can be found in Suleiman, *Archaeology and History*, pp. 3-4.





PLATE 2



possess terrible powers. Adityawarman, as we shall see, presented himself as a ruler who was both fearsome and benevolent and it may be that these spiritual powers were part of the source of his authority over Suvarnabhumi.

By asserting dominion over neighbouring polities and claiming lordship over the gold lands Adityawarman participated in a long tradition among the Sumatran kings of Malayu and Srivijaya. He may have also extended an existing vocabulary of Malay kingship with his demonic spiritual rituals.<sup>28</sup> Adityawarman's son, Ananggawarman, was also consecrated as a Cakravartin, a world ruler, in a demonic form.<sup>29</sup> Although we know little about Minangkabau kings in the fifteenth century, it will be part of the argument here that these traditions were not lost to later Minangkabau and Malay rulers. Adityawarman transferred the overlordship of Malayu to his inland kingdom in the Minangkabau highlands and later Minangkabau rulers, it will emerge, also partook of the old Malay traditions of overlordship, and some of the new variations, which Adityawarman brought with him. Seventeenth and eighteenth century Minangkabau kings, the thesis will show, were not just the shadowy remnants of an ancient kingdom, as later British writers suggested. They were active exponents of a style of kingship which offered many of the same advantages as that of earlier Malay rulers.

The process by which kingship was accommodated within the Minangkabau highlands remains unclear. It may be that by first exerting authority over Malayu and Palembang Adityawarman secured the important east coast outlets for gold and thereby offered the Minangkabau region a new control over east coast trade. Later sources certainly suggest that the royal dynasty was involved in the distribution of

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<sup>28</sup> Although it should be noted that there had long been a Tantric flavour to the Buddhism taught in Suvarnabhūmi.

<sup>29</sup> Suleiman suggests that Ananggawarman was consecrated in the demonic form of a Hewajra figure. *History and Archaeology*, p. 6.



gold.<sup>30</sup> Towards the end of his reign, however, Adityawarman, and later his successors, may have begun to lose control over the coast as the tributary trade with China revived.

Chinese records reveal that Adityawarman sent envoys to China between 1371-5, but so did at least one other ruler in south west Sumatra. This has been taken as an indication of rival claims to the coast, probably from Palembang. In 1377, the Chinese records suggest, Adityawarman's successor made a bid for independent recognition from China, a move which brought him into conflict with Java. Javanese retaliation was felt in Palembang and by the early fifteenth century that port was taken over by Chinese trader-settlers.<sup>31</sup> What happened between the highland kingdom and Java is not clear. Sumatran texts recall that it was during a contest with Majapahit that the name Minangkabau was acquired.<sup>32</sup> While the historicity of this tradition cannot be tested, the name Minangkabau certainly came into more general use in this period and, in 1405, the *Yung-lo Shih-lu* mentions that imperial envoys were sent to "Minang-ko-po".<sup>33</sup>

Within Minangkabau, Adityawarman's successors may have encountered resistance to assertions of their authority. We do not know what happened, but many later Minangkabau traditions suggest, in one form or another, that within the *darat*, the authority of the royal house was tempered by a deep-seated attachment to self

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<sup>30</sup> See the description by Pires cited in Chapter Three below.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed consideration of these events see Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, Chapter Five. A slightly different perspective on Minangkabau involvement can be found in Suleiman, *Archaeology and History*.

<sup>32</sup> See, for instance, *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, R. Jones (ed.), Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1987, pp. 74-5. The Javanese court text, *Nagarakertagama*, mentioned "Manangkabwa" in 1365. See T. G. Th. *Java in the 14th Century: A study in Cultural History*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962, vol. III, Canto 13.

<sup>33</sup> Wang Gungwu "The Opening of Relations Between China and Malacca, 1403-5", in J. Bastin and R. Roolvink (eds.) *Malayan and Indonesian Studies*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, p. 97.

government by lineage elders. In these, later, traditions, the founders of the two Minangkabau *laras*, Datuk Katamunggang and Datuk Perpatih nan Sabatang are presented as forming, along with the Maharajadiraja, a sort of ancestral troika in the heritage of the Minangkabau world. Later chapters will consider this balance of roles in more detail.

At the same time, Adityawarman's successors appear to have maintained their interest in the coastal regions of Sumatra. Taufik Abdullah has called attention to the dual nature of the Minangkabau realm. In the *darat*, he suggests, the kings were a sacred institution, whereas in the *rantau* the rulers exercised a more directly political role and the coastal regions were governed by representatives of the royal house.<sup>34</sup> This insight is vital to an understanding of the contribution which kingship made to Minangkabau society in the fourteenth century and to the lasting nature of an institution which looked unimportant to many outsiders. It will be necessary to explore both these aspects of Minangkabau kingship with care in order to understand their complexity. What stands out is the way in which kingship served to link the two parts, the inner and the outer, of the Minangkabau World and thereby to shape a response to the geographical and environmental niche in which the Minangkabau found themselves.

## Landscape and History

The physical shape of Sumatra can never be ignored in studies of the island's history. Vast distances, interaction between the mountainous interior and the coastal regions and the different cultural styles which have developed in the different

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<sup>34</sup> Taufik Abdullah, "Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau", *Indonesia*, vol.2 (1966), p. 5.

geographic spheres have all helped to shape regional history. Geography has also had an important effect upon the way in which Sumatra has been perceived, both in local eyes and in those of foreign travellers. This applies particularly to perceptions of the inland kingdom of Minangkabau which was visited by only one European before Raffles entered the *darat* with his wife and entourage in 1818. Like many parts of Southeast Asia, the sources for Minangkabau history are partly governed by the availability of foreign travel accounts.

This chapter opened with a glimpse of the way in which late eighteenth and early nineteenth century writers conjectured the ancient past of Minangkabau. We then took a privileged, modern, look at some of the evidence concerning that past to assess what might be knowable about the nature of the "splendour" which those writers imagined. Another way of approaching this question is to examine the impressions of the first Europeans to reach southeast Asian waters and to view Minangkabau through their eyes as they sailed around Sumatra in the early sixteenth century.

### ENCIRCLING SUMATRA

When Iskandar Muda of Aceh claimed ownership over ports in north and west Sumatra in the early seventeenth century, Europeans could see what he meant. He included the old name Semudra in this list and Europeans took this to mean the whole of Sumatra.<sup>35</sup> This was a convincing idea because of the amount of territory which the king controlled, moreover he could send his ships to intimidate almost every part of

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<sup>35</sup> W.G. Shellabear, "An Account of some of the oldest Malay MSS. now extant", *JSBRAS*, vol. 31 (1889-99), pp. 123-8; and "Articles set down by the King of Dacheh and delivered to Sir James Lancaster. A.D. 1603", in E. Foster, (ed.), *Letters Received by the East India Company from its Servants in the East*, Amsterdam, 1968, vol. 1 1602-1613, p. 1.

the island. When the Minangkabau ruler was referred to as king or emperor over the whole island it was an altogether different matter, and one which intrigued and perplexed the Europeans who approached the kingdom. What sort of control did he exercise? Could he help them gain access to the famous gold mines? How could he be approached?

Given the importance of this coastal-hinterland relationship in Minangkabau history, a consideration of the early European search for an Emperor of Minangkabau calls for particular sensitivity towards spatial perceptions of the kingdom. It also requires an appreciation of the limitations of travel accounts of Sumatra prior to the nineteenth century, which were, by their nature, confined to an encirclement of the island. The rise and fall of Sumatran coastal centres is reflected in foreign sources from an early period, in Chinese dynastic annals and in the works of Arab geographers some of which have already been mentioned. But, despite the importance of products garnered in the forests and mountains inland, few foreign sources contain any details concerning the interior of Sumatra. Foreign merchants sailed around the island and traded on beaches and in the river mouths, but they rarely penetrated further than the coastal plain.

Early European perceptions of the kings of Minangkabau were based, therefore, upon rumour and report. The hidden nature of the inland kingdom lent itself to imaginative constructions and an aura of mystery. And what most excited these imaginings was the gold for which Sumatra, and Minangkabau in particular, was famous.

### **The Portuguese**

When the Portuguese arrived in the archipelago they heard rumours of an

island of gold and soon identified Sumatra as that island. The Portuguese traveller, Mendes Pinto, refers to King John III's efforts to discover the fabled "Isle of Gold"<sup>36</sup> and expeditions were sent out from Melaka to find the source of this wealth. In 1519 Diogo Pacheco sailed right around Sumatra in his attempt to locate the source of the gold and, in 1520, he and his ship were lost in west Sumatra on the same quest.<sup>37</sup> Even at the end of sixteenth century van Linschoten remarked on Portuguese aspirations to conquer the island of Sumatra, "although they doe still talke thereof but doe it not."<sup>38</sup>

Minangkabau was soon identified as the place from which the gold came. Albuquerque and Duarte Barbosa, writing in 1518, described Minangkabau as a source of gold<sup>39</sup>, as did Pinto who spent part of his career in Melaka. Portuguese references to Minangkabau through the sixteenth century are scattered and often vague, but considered together they can give us not only an idea of the way in which Europeans perceived the rulers of Minangkabau in this period, but also some indication of the shape of the Minangkabau polity. One expedition which actually did penetrate the interior and make contact with a Minangkabau king set out from Melaka in 1515 under the command of Jorge Botelho. The Portuguese were anxious to secure supplies for Melaka and Botelho sailed up the Siak River where the king was said to have his capital. According to Castanheda's report Botelho,

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<sup>36</sup> Rebecca D. Catz (ed. and trans.), *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 20.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 543 n. 4 and Teile, "De Europeers", pp. 364-5. The source for Teile's information on Diogo Pacheco is Barros, *Decadas da Asia*.

<sup>38</sup> A.C. Burnell (ed.), *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies*, vol. 1, p. 109.

<sup>39</sup> T.F. Earle and John Villiers, *Albuquerque Caesar of the East. Selected texts by Alfonso de Albuquerque and his son*, Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1990, p. 139. According to Barbosa, Minangkabau was "the principal source of the mined gold found in this island. It is like that found on the shores of streams and rivers, a wonderful thing", M.L. Dames, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, London: Hakluyt Society, 1921, vol. II, p. 186.

decided to proceed to Minangkabau and meet "the king of the great gold mines", hoping to do business with him from Melaka, getting gold and provisions in exchange for cloth.

The river was low and Botelho

was not able to sail there and instead sent a party of Melaka Christians overland with a guide provided by the King of Siak.

This delegation, which travelled with a letter to the king,

ended up in Kampar, which was not far from where they were. The people of Kampar, who knew Jorge Botelho, helped them get to Minangkabau. This king is heathen and lord of many gold mines. After reading the letter, he gave them a warm welcome and answered back to Jorge Botelho that he wished to be in peace with the Portuguese and to trade with Melaka.<sup>40</sup>

The king undertook to send his own boats to Siak and these arrived carrying "gold, provisions and *aguila* [*gaharu* wood]".<sup>41</sup>

The exact route followed by the Portuguese envoys is not known but the part riverine and part overland journey to the Minangkabau interior via the Kampar is one which is mentioned in records from later centuries and this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five in relation to another, seventeenth century, expedition inland. The identity of the heathen "King of Minangkabau" who is mentioned here also remains obscure. The court may have been situated in the Buo region near the headwaters of the Kampar Kiri and the evidence suggests that there were close relations between this kingdom and a ruler in the interior of Siak.

A local source, the *Sejarah Melayu*, which depicts the world of Melaka in the fifteenth and early sixteenth, centuries describes the link between Siak and

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<sup>40</sup> Fernao Lopes de Castanheda, *Historia do descobrimento & conquista da India pelos Portugueses*. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1924-1933, 4 vols, vol II, p. 359-363. A translation of this passage was kindly made available by Dr Pierre-Yves Manguin.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. Tiele also mentions Castanheda's account in P. A. Tiele, "De Europeers in den Maleischen Archipel", *BKI*, vol. 25 (1877), p. 348. Castanheda also refers to the mining and panning of gold in Minangkabau rivers and to the arrival in Melaka, in 1512, of 3 *penjajap* from Minangkabau which carried a large quantity of gold, *Historia do descobrimento*, vol. 1 p.456 and vol. 2 p. 186 respectively. Once again I am grateful to Dr Manguin for this information.

Minangkabau as one of common descent.<sup>42</sup> According to the Raffles 18 text Sultan Mansur Syah of Melaka made war on Siak

because Siak had once been a large *negeri*. Its Raja was descended from Raja Pagaruyung, who derived his origin from Sang Sapurba who came down from Bukit Si-Guntang Mahameru and would not submit to Melaka".<sup>43</sup>

Other references to Siak in this text suggest a tension with Melaka deriving from the region's Minangkabau loyalties; these include one incident where this ruler's successor was disciplined and another in which Siak's newly subservient behaviour is demonstrated. A similar treatment is given, in the text, to Kampar, the rulers of which were also said to descend from the Kings of Pagaruyung. These references point to a concern on the part of Melaka's chroniclers (from whatever century) to assert Melakan authority on what appears to have been a sensitive boundary between the Minangkabau and Melakan spheres.

Returning to European perceptions from the early sixteenth century, the well known Portuguese writer, Tomé Pires, described Minangkabau as a country in the interior of Sumatra where a great deal of gold was collected. There were three kings, Pires wrote, who were "favoured with gold, the metal which God chose".<sup>44</sup>

The chief one is called *Raja Cunci Teras*, which is the place where he resides; the second is called *Raja Bandar*, brother of the king already mentioned; the third is called *Raja Bonco* or *Buus*. These are the kings of Menangkabau. The first they say has been a Mohammedan for a short time -almost fifteen years; the [other] two they say are still heathens. These often quarrel, and there is war between them most of the time.

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<sup>42</sup> Of course the available nineteenth century recensions of this text are not contemporary sources. They do, however, offer an idea of how Siak may have been regarded in Melaka during this period.

<sup>43</sup> "Al-kesah maka tersebut-lah perkataan Sultan Mansur Shah hendak menyuroh menyerang Siak, karna Siak itu dahulu negeri besar, raja-nya dari-pada anak chuchu Raja Pagar Ruyong, asal dari-pada Sang Sapurba yang turun dari-pada Bukit Si-Guntang Mahameru wa tiada ia menyembah ka-Malaka." R. O. Winstedt, "The Malay Annals", *JMBRAS*, vol. xvi, 1938, p. 123. See also Brown, *Sejarah Melayu*, [124-4].

<sup>44</sup> A. Cortesão, A. (trans.), *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, (2 vols.) London: Hakluyt Society, 1944, vol. 1, p. 164.

A discussion of the role and titles of these three rulers will be postponed until Chapter Five, but it is worth adding, at this point, that, according to Pires, the Muslim king of Minangkabau was married to a sister of Sultan Mansur Syah of Melaka (1459-77), who was responsible for converting him. "Others affirm that the said king is still not a Moor to this day. The truth is that he is a Moor, with about a hundred of his men; all the other people are heathens."<sup>45</sup>

Albuquerque told the same story in his description of Melaka in 1511-12 which stated that the people of Minangkabau were Hindus. They sent a mission to Melaka, he relates, and professed

a great veneration for a certain golden head-dress (*carapuca de ouro*) which, as they relate, Alexander left there with them when he conquered their country.<sup>46</sup>

News of Alexander the Great (or Iskandar Zulkarnain) probably reached Minangkabau with other histories and legends favoured in the Muslim world and it is interesting to see that Iskandar and his crown were embraced before many Minangkabau had accepted Islam. It is tempting, too, to speculate whether this image of a conquering king held any memory of the fiery ruler Adityawarman.

Pires was interested in the gold wealth of Minangkabau he goes so far as to identify mines and detail their ownership.

The chief mine from which the most gold is obtained, and the largest, is the country through which the river called *Cuencynjgujs* flows; and the second, where it is found more in powder, is called *Marapalaguj*. They say that all the three above-mentioned kings can collect from one mine and the other, which is a law of the land, and that no Moor may go to the mines. Only the heathen lords have the mines and they have the gold and from there it is distributed to the kings of Menangkabau, and from the three kings it is distributed to others, and [as for] the amount of gold which is obtained from the said mines every year, they say that they get two bahars of gold, and more according to the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>46</sup> Alfonso Albuquerque, *The Commentaries of the Great Alfonso Dalboquerque*, ed. W. de Gray Birch, New York: Burt Franklin, 1880 vol. III, p. 162.



Moors.<sup>47</sup>

The actual mines mentioned by Pires are difficult to identify precisely, but later evidence suggests that there were two main gold producing regions in the interior, both in Tanah Datar; one to the east, near Buo, in the Sinamar and Sumpur river valleys, and the other to the west, near Suruasoo.<sup>48</sup>

In describing the routes along which gold flowed to the coast Pires contrasted the east and west coasts of Sumatra in a way which assists us to map the shape of the Minangkabau sphere. He distinguishes between the "Malacca side" where, "beginning at the land of Arcat up to Jambi, the land is called Menangkabau, although it is more properly the hinterland", and the "other side of the island of Sumatra, towards the south" where Pariaman, Tiku and "Panchur" were situated. While Minangkabau gold reached Melaka by way of Kampar and Inderagiri, both of which had borders with, and in a sense were part of, Minangkabau<sup>49</sup>, Pires depicts most of the Minangkabau gold trade in the early sixteenth century flowing westwards to the ports of Barus, Pariaman and Tiku.

All the gold in the land of Menangkabau goes out through these ports, and without doubt the most important part of the whole island is here, where the gold is found, whether there is little or much in the whole island.<sup>50</sup>

On the west coast gold and other products were sold to Muslim merchants who

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 164-5.

<sup>48</sup> See C. Dobbin, "Economic Change in Minangkabau as a Factor in the Rise of the Padri Movement", *Indonesia*, No. 23 (April 1977), pp. 8-9. Cortesão locates "Cuencyngujs" as the Sungai Si Njnje, a tributary of the Kampar and "Marapalaguj" as the Muara Pelangi in the headwaters of the Inderagiri river, *Suma Oriental*, p. 165.

<sup>49</sup> While Pires recognised that Kampar and Inderagiri had their own rulers who were related to the kings of Melaka, he also described the kingdoms of the east coast from Arcat to Jambi as being "all Menangkabau land and they are all Malays." Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

had a long association with the region.<sup>51</sup> In 1511 Sulaiman bin Ahmad al-Mahri referred to Arab, south Indian and Gujarati sailors who visited the west coast of Sumatra and confirmed Pires' impression that Pariaman was part of Minangkabau.<sup>52</sup>

The most well known ports on the west coast are: the port of Fansur, the port for *Riyahi* camphor, gold and other products; the port of Pariaman, is also known among men as Manaqabuh, this is the port for gold dust and aloeswood; the port of Inderapura, which is no longer so well known, but was famous once.<sup>53</sup>

Sixteenth century European forays into this Muslim trading zone were very tentative and, on the whole, they reveal little about Minangkabau. Acehese expansion into the coastal regions of north Sumatra began in the middle of the sixteenth century under Sultan Alauddin al-Kahar (1537-68). We know that the Acehese king forged marriage alliances with west coast rulers, but it is difficult to establish what effect this thrust had on Minangkabau kingship.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Pires commented that the kingdoms on the west coast were very rich and that "the Gujaratees come here every year with one ship, or two or three, with merchandise. Cortesão, *Suma Oriental*, vol. I, pp.161-2. This was at least partially the result of Portugal's conquest of Melaka, in 1511, which meant that shipping which had once used the Straits of Malacca now sailed down the west coast of Sumatra to the Sunda Straits. See M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influence in the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1630*, (The Hague, 1962), p. 144 and Burnell (ed.), *The Voyage of John Huygen van Linschoten*, vol. i, p. 109. It is also likely, however, that west Sumatran ports had been familiar with Muslim sailors for some time. For a discussion of the long standing commercial relationship which one west Sumatran port maintained with Indian Ocean merchants see Jane Drakard, "An Indian Ocean Port: Sources for the Earlier History of Barus". *Archipel*, vol. 37 (1989) pp. 53-82.

<sup>52</sup> This region, which Pires calls the "Panchur side" of the island, was the goal of direct voyages from Gujarat to Fansur/Barus and back. *al-'Umdat al-Mahriyah fi Dabt al-'Ulum al Najmiyah*, cited in Tibbetts, *A Study of the Arabic Texts*, pp. 215-6.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223

<sup>54</sup> J. Kathirithamby-Wells, "Acehese Control over West Sumatra up to the Treaty of Painan, 1663", *JSEAH*, vol. 10, 3, (1969), pp.455-6. In the seventeenth century a Sultan of Inderapura told the VOC that his ancestor, Raja Dewi, had married Sultan Mughal of Pariaman, one of Alauddin al-Kahar's sons. One of her brothers travelled to Aceh to search for her and was made Sultan there. This is recorded in a letter from the Sultan to the VOC. *Dagh-Register*, 1673, p. 162 and Raden Hoesein Djajadiningrat, "Critisch Overzicht van de in Maleische Werken vervatte gegevens over de Geschiedenis van het Soeltanaat van Atjeh", *BKI*, vol. 65 (1911), pp. 164-5. In Djajadiningrat's opinion this was Ali Riayat Syah also known as Raja Bujang who succeeded the brief reign of Sultan Mansur Syah (1576-86) and only reigned for three years before he was murdered and replaced (p. 168).

In 1529 two French ships led by Jean and Raoul Parmentier travelled down the west coast of Sumatra in search of gold and pepper. This was the region that Pires linked so closely with the Minangkabau interior, but the record of this voyage makes no reference to Minangkabau itself.<sup>55</sup> Yet the report of one, calamitous, Portuguese expedition does suggest that Inderapura was part of Minangkabau in this period. In 1561 a group of Portuguese castaways, survivors of the ship *San Paulo*, reported that they had met a son of the king of Minangkabau at a west coast port which was probably Inderapura.<sup>56</sup>

The castaways were told that the river "was the river of 'Menencabo', where there was then living a son of the king of Campar".<sup>57</sup> The *kuala* was governed by a Syahbandar and the king was said to live inland, "at a distance of a day or two's journey".<sup>58</sup> When the king arrived from the interior he was accompanied by eighty canoes and considerable ceremony, including "the accompaniment of many kettle-drums, conch-shells, hunting-horns and little bells".<sup>59</sup>

The ruler described himself as "a son of the king of Minangkabau" and he

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<sup>55</sup> M. Ch. Schefer (ed.), *Le discours de la navigation de Jean et Raoul Parmentier de Dieppe. Voyage a Sumatra en 1529*, Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1883, pp. 60-4 and pp. 79-83.

<sup>56</sup> An account of this voyage was written by one of the survivors, Henrique Dias, and was published in 1565. The text of the *Voyage and Shipwreck of the Great Ship Sao Paulo* has been translated and edited by C.R. Boxer in *Further Selections from the Tragic History of the Sea 1559-1565*, Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1968, p. 97. My assumption that the port they describe was Inderapura rests on the castaways' description of a partially navigable river. They brought their boat into the *kuala* and the ruler is said to have made a canoe journey downstream to meet the sailors. There are few sites on the west coast where much riverine traffic is feasible and of these Inderapura is the most likely location. Inderapura is situated on a flat and marshy part of the coast with two tributaries feeding the river that flows into the sea at Pasirganting. A Dutch Report of 1672 mentions that the river at Inderapura was deep enough to enter with a ship. SWK 1672 VOC 1282, f. 1611. There are also many traditions which suggest that the first rulers of Inderapura were related to the Minangkabau royal house. See, for example, Katherine Stenger Frey, *Journey to the Land of the Earth Goddess*, Jakarta: Gramedia, 1986.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98. The account by Henrique Dias also mentions a "Bendara", p. 100.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

offered to convey the party overland to Melaka, a journey which he said would take about ten days. He was a "very gentlemanly looking youth, richly dressed, with a gold-decorated kris, and a very costly turban on his head". He sat in state and received the Portuguese leaders with honour, although shortly afterwards the Europeans were ambushed and forced to flee.<sup>60</sup> We learn, therefore, not only that the king of Inderapura was said to be a Minangkabau prince, but also that his father was considered to be ruler over Kampar as well as Minangkabau.<sup>61</sup>

This suggests something of the flexibility and scope of Minangkabau kingship in the sixteenth century. In the one hundred and thirty or so years since Adityawarman's death the association between gold and kingship in Minangkabau had not faded. On the contrary, the west coast trade with Muslim merchants who had visited the area since the ninth century was flourishing. There was competition between the rulers, Pires reported, but also veneration for a crown of kingship which was associated with a conquering prince. By this time the Minangkabau had heard about Iskandar Zulkarnain who was to become a central figure in their legends. It is also clear that the kingdom stretched across the east and west coast *rantau* regions. Minangkabau kingship was represented in areas as far apart as Siak and Inderapura and this was to become a developing theme in Minangkabau history.

The Portuguese were envious of the rich west coast trade described by Pires and Sulaiman and their eagerness to acquire gold made them curious about the rulers

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 100. As Boxer points out, the surprise attack which was launched on the Europeans is not hard to explain. During their journey down the coast the castaways had stolen boats and other goods, killing the local owners some of whom had died under torture. The king and his subjects would have learnt of this from locals who had been captured by the Portuguese and probably also by Malays living further up the coast.

<sup>61</sup> The *Sejarah Melayu* notes that the kings of Kampar were descended from Minangkabau, although relations between the two regions were probably affected when Sultan Muzaffir Syah of Melaka conquered Siak, Kampar and Inderagiri. After the fall of Melaka the royal house of Kampar may have returned to a closer connection with the Minangkabau interior.

who were said to control this wealth. The category of people described as "Minangkabau" enters the written record in this period and that classification was used increasingly in European accounts from the seventeenth century as travellers and merchants became more aware of local circumstances. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, conditions were changing. New products, such as pepper, became prominent in local trade and new Europeans entered the market with the advent of English and Dutch merchants in the archipelago.

### English and Dutch Contacts

By the end of the sixteenth century English and Dutch merchants had begun to visit the archipelago and make observations about local polities. These accounts from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries have little to say, however, about the interior of Sumatra. In 1598 van Linschoten described Minangkabau as lying on the west coast on the same latitude as Kampar. It was known for its fine metal working and its *kris* manufacture. He had heard of a volcano inland "that burneth continually" and, as we have seen, he was aware of Portuguese aspirations to conquer the island and obtain access to the gold.<sup>62</sup> Early in the seventeenth century the French Admiral, Beaulieu, referred to a Minangkabau ruler situated between Tikou and Minangkabau who was "more powerful than all the others together" and who possessed great riches, "having in his power most of the places where the gold of this island is found".<sup>63</sup>

Generally, though, the northern Europeans were at first less interested than

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<sup>62</sup> A.C. Burnell (ed.), *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten*, vol. 1, p. 109.

<sup>63</sup> Augustin de Beaulieu, "Mémoires du voyage aux Indes Orientales du Général de Beaulieu, dressés par luy-mesme", in M. Thévenot (ed.) *Relations de divers voyages curieux*, Paris: Cramoisy, 1666 vol. II, p. 97.

the Portuguese in the interior of Sumatra because they were in pursuit not of gold, but of pepper which had developed as a Sumatran crop during the sixteenth century. Pepper began to be grown in the west coast regions to meet a European demand. Established ports such as Tiku and Pariaman became collection centres for pepper brought from the less accessible growing regions such as Passaman and Bajang, both of which were considered to be unhealthy for Europeans.<sup>64</sup> Pepper was also grown in the intermediate highlands of east Sumatra and transported for export to Jambi and Inderagiri. In all these regions Dutch and English merchants began to compete energetically for trading rights and cargoes of pepper.

This development coincided with a resurgence of Acehnese influence in west Sumatra under Iskandar Muda (1607-36). During Iskandar Muda's reign Aceh maintained a forceful grip over the west coast. Royal representatives, or *panglima*, were posted at the major centres to control the in and out flow of goods, and these were subject to retribution from Aceh if their performance was not satisfactory. English and Dutch merchants were obliged to compete with the Gujeratis who frequented west Sumatran ports and to gain the permission of the King of Aceh before they were allowed to trade there at all.<sup>65</sup> In these circumstances East India Company merchants of both nations were preoccupied with their experiences on the coast, and they scarcely considered what lay inland. Iskandar Muda styled himself ruler over the whole of Sumatra and over the gold mines of Pariaman, and little was made of any other kingdom in reports from the west coast.

In east Sumatra, however, the Europeans who had perched themselves at the coastal outlets were more aware of Minangkabau. By the early seventeenth century

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<sup>64</sup> Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 72-3.

<sup>65</sup> J. Kathirithamby-Wells, "Acehnese Control", pp. 461-4. In the early part of the seventeenth century both European nations secured licenses to trade on the west coast, but these were limited both in their duration and the access they offered (*Ibid.*, pp. 462-3).

Jambi had become a major centre for the export of pepper grown in the upper reaches of the Batang Hari, which were settled by Minangkabau migrants. As the letters of Dutchmen stationed in Jambi testify, trade there in the early years was a question of waiting for the "Minangkabaus" and the people of Kuaman to bring their pepper downstream.<sup>66</sup> The producers had a choice over where to trade. The complex river system of the upper Batang Hari gave them access to Inderagiri to the east, and to Agam in central Sumatra with a route to the west coast.<sup>67</sup> In this context European merchants directed their gaze inland with more attention than those who visited the west coast.

From Jambi Dutchmen noted the influence of Minangkabau rulers and their representatives among the *rantau* settlers who had moved downstream to participate in the pepper trade. In 1625 Minangkabau merchants were reported to have claimed that "their 'king' had forbidden them to come down to Jambi because two or three of their number had been attacked and robbed there".<sup>68</sup> The Dagh-Register of the VOC refers to an "*overste*", or chief over the Minangkabau population inland and, upstream from Tanjung on the Batang Hari, "four regents governed as representatives of Pagar

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<sup>66</sup> J. P. Coen, *Bescheiden Omtrent zijn Bedrijf in Indie*, W. Ph. Coolhaas (ed.) 's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952, Vol. I, pp. 177-8, 189, 204, 255; vol. II p. 87, p. 119, p. 222 and *passim*; W. Foster, (ed.) *Letters Received by the East India Company from its Servants in the East*, London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co., 1901, vol. II, p. 146; vol. III, p. 204; vol. IV, p. 24-6;

<sup>67</sup> B.W. Andaya, "Cash Cropping and Upstream-Downstream Tensions: The Case of Jambi in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", in A. Reid (ed.) *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power, Belief*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 100. According to one Dutch report from 1616 pepper was produced by a people living in the hills of central Sumatra, called Minangkabaus. It was transported via the various rivers to the coast where it was exchanged for cloth. Some of the best pepper was sent to the west coast, it was also exported via Palembang, Jambi, Inderagiri and Kampar to the east and perhaps the greatest quantity flowed through Jambi, Coen, *Bescheiden*, vol 1, pp. 177-8 and. For references to pepper flowing westwards, rather than to Jambi, see Coen, vol. 7, pp. 112-3 and Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, Vol. I, p. 146 and p. 351.

<sup>68</sup> B.W. Andaya, "Cash-Cropping", p. 100.

Ruyong".<sup>69</sup> A "Raja Pagar Ruyong, the greatest King of Minangkabau" was said to have appeared to collect tribute in Tanjung in 1642.<sup>70</sup>

At the same time Minangkabau government was described as having a "wild or popular" character.<sup>71</sup> The passage of goods was often held up by internal disputes. In Jambi in 1616, English and Dutch merchants reported that the Minangkabau had not appeared with pepper for two years and that it was forty years since so little pepper had passed through the port. The reason for this was that the Minangkabau were at war with each other.<sup>72</sup> As one Dutch merchant prayed, in 1617, "God grant that meanwhile the quarrellers of Minangkabau and Kuaman will come down with their pepper".<sup>73</sup>

These observations reflect themes which the VOC were to encounter later, in seventeenth century west coast society. Royal representatives of Minangkabau were involved in the coastal world, especially when the *rantau* population were faced with external threat and challenges, but they governed lightly. This was no authoritarian state and internal divisions appear to have been incorporated within the political life of the region.

In east Sumatra, in the early seventeenth century, Dutchmen noticed the type of pressures which discouraged the inland Minangkabau from bringing their goods to the coast. These were both economic and cultural. In 1632 some Minangkabau were said to prefer taking their pepper to the west coast, where the inhabitants were their

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<sup>69</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 14, p. 195 and Andaya, *Ibid*.

<sup>70</sup> B.W. Andaya, "Cash-Cropping", p. 101.

<sup>71</sup> Coen, *Bescheiden*, I, p. 178.

<sup>72</sup> Coen, *Bescheiden*, vol. I, pp. 177-8, vol. VII, p. 112-3; and Foster, *Letters Received*, vol. IV (1616), p. 26.

<sup>73</sup> Coen, *Bescheiden*, vol. II, p. 250, the correspondent adapts a Malay term and calls the disputants "bekelayers".



"own people", than to the Javanized centres of Jambi and Palembang.<sup>74</sup> And, between 1616 and 1619, English and Dutch merchants reported that the Minangkabau were refusing to bring pepper downstream to Inderagiri because of the bad treatment they had received from the ruler there.<sup>75</sup>

VOC servants observed that this ruler of Inderagiri, by now a vassal of Johor, was locked in conflict with a king of Minangkabau and the tensions between these two help us to understand how the Minangkabau periphery worked. Because of Acehese aggression, the Dutch noted, the ruler of Inderagiri sought to move his capital inland, but this was resisted by the "Coninck der Manicabers" who claimed ownership over the site chosen.<sup>76</sup> The Minangkabau king in question may have been the ruler of Kuantan and a representative of the Minangkabau court.

In 1641, shortly after the Dutch conquest of Melaka, letters were received there from the king and the "young Yang Dipertuan" of Inderagiri acknowledging the Dutch presence and stating their intention of returning to "old Inderagiri".<sup>77</sup> At the same time a letter came from a "Minangkabau king" named "Hinoman" [or Inoman] who called himself "Soltan Pagaroyongh", and who lived in the interior of Inderagiri.<sup>78</sup> He expressed his friendship towards the Company, summing up his

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<sup>74</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. I, p. 351 and Andaya, "Cash Cropping", pp. 6-7.

<sup>75</sup> Coen, *Bescheiden*, vol. 7, p. 89. The King's rule was considered by Dutchmen to be much too harsh, *Ibid.*, p. 117. In 1620, however, the Minangkabau were tempted downstream again by a rich Dutch cargo of cloth, and in 1624 a Minangkabau force is said to have co-operated with the Sultan of Inderagiri in resisting an attack by Aceh. Coen, *Bescheiden*, vol. VII, p. 684; *Dagh-Register*, vol. 1 (1624), pp. 27-8. By 1626 Minangkabau pepper was once again flowing through Inderagiri, *Ibid.*, p. 284.

<sup>76</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 2 (1631), p. 113 and Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. I, p. 349. This was a dispute which was to last for many years. References to the Inderagiri's wars with the Minangkabau continue into the 1660's, see for instance *Dagh-Register*, vol. 15 (1664), p. 81, p. 265 and Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. III (1667), p. 544.

<sup>77</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 5 (1641) p. 255 and p. 278-9.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

sentiments with the declaration that "Batavia is Pagaroyongh ende Pagaroyongh is Batavia".<sup>79</sup> Inoman is situated on the edge of the Kuantan district, high up the Inderagiri river between Basarah and Caranti, both of which are known to have been outlying royal centres in the past.<sup>80</sup> It seems likely, therefore, that this was the king who opposed the relocation of Inderagiri.

The friction between these two rulers may reflect two types of political model in action on the Minangkabau frontier. The king in Kuantan was located on the edge of the *darat* core. He used a Minangkabau royal title and probably spoke for Minangkabau traders who moved between the hills and the coast. The ruler of Inderagiri, on the other hand, fitted the Malay pattern of a downstream king who sought to tax those who brought their goods to the coast. Despite old ties between Minangkabau and Inderagiri this ruler's loyalty was probably no longer with the interior and Minangkabau interests were protected from Kuantan on the edge of the *rantau*. Rather than coercing the merchants, "Soltan Pagaroyongh", or another who used the same title, could call upon ties of loyalty to draw tribute from Minangkabau settlers in the frontier regions. His presence may have offered the *rantau* population a cultural and political resource and a link with their homeland.

The extent to which Minangkabau settlers drew succour from their bonds with the *darat* was also apparent to the VOC in Jambi where they noticed considerable tension between the Jambi court and the Minangkabau pepper producers inland. In the early 1661's these settlers rebelled against Jambi's attempts to enforce its authority inland. The Pangeran Dipati of Jambi asked the VOC to send a large gift

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 278. This was, to some extent, a conventional local formula of mutuality and reciprocity, in 1529 the king and lords of Tiku expressed their friendship towards the Parmentiers with the phrase "Tiku France and France Tiku", Schefer, *Le Discours*, p. 66.

<sup>80</sup> According to descendants of the Minangkabau royal family living in Tanah Datar and Buo today, Minangkabau royal seals are still held as *pusaka* (or heirlooms) by descendants of the royal house in both of these places.

inland to the "King of the Minangkabaus" in order to help obtain his help against the rebellious people of Kuaman.<sup>81</sup> But in 1663 a further rebellion saw a thousand people flee to the Minangkabau hills.<sup>82</sup>

### **Dutchmen Identify an Emperor Inland**

Having been alerted to the presence of an influential Minangkabau ruler in the interior of Jambi VOC servants began to wonder if this king might be a useful ally for the Company. In 1663 Evert Michielsens recommended to his superiors that the VOC might benefit from making contact with the ruler of Minangkabau, who he referred to as "Keizer" or Emperor of Sumatra.<sup>83</sup> By this time European demand for pepper was slowing. Pepper was still in saleable in inter-Asian trade, but prices had begun to fall. European commerce in the archipelago became more complex as demand rose in Europe for Indian cottons which could be purchased in India with gold. In these circumstances Minangkabau gold took on a renewed significance and European eyes were once again turned inland to the famous mines, rivers and mountains of gold.<sup>84</sup>

VOC officials often termed more powerful local rulers Keizers, as opposed to *koning* or kings, but Michielsens went further. He described the Minangkabau ruler as

Emperor over the whole land of Sumatra and all the Minangkabaus; under whose command the whole land really stands and who is lord over the pepper and the gold which flows to the east and west sides of Sumatra.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 13, pp. 370-1.

<sup>82</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 15, pp. 53-4 and B.W. Andaya, *Cash Cropping*, p. 101.

<sup>83</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 14, pp. 195-7, see p. 197 for a contemporary comment of Michielsens's own interests in this dispute.

<sup>84</sup> Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 77.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

This idea, that a Minangkabau king ruled over all the Minangkabau regions of Sumatra, was an appealing one, especially since the Company was, at this time, extending its own trading network into the west coast of the island and hoped to gain access to the gold inland.

The quest for gold was to lead to a more serious European interest in Minangkabau kingship in the second half of the seventeenth century and to short lived dreams of an Emperor of Sumatra who could ensure Dutch profits.

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Between the early sixteenth and the middle of the seventeenth centuries Europeans began to construct for themselves an image of the Minangkabau kingdom which was based upon intermittent contact with the coastal regions of Sumatra. Early European attention depended upon commercial considerations and, in particular, upon the quest for gold which had been so precious to the Portuguese. Dutch interest in the rulers of Minangkabau was stimulated in the second half of the seventeenth century just as gold gained importance in their own commercial thinking. In using European sources to assess the character of Minangkabau sovereignty in these early years it is important to bear in mind the extent to which the information available to us is conditioned by these commercial interests. Silences in the historical record must be heeded with the same care as are the rare pieces of information available.

From their first appearance in the waters of the Malay archipelago European travellers made persistent, but vague, references to the Kings of Minangkabau in the interior of Sumatra. In the sixteenth century a Minangkabau ruler was reported to dwell high up on the Kampar river. Inland from Pariaman and in Inderapura Europeans heard of Minangkabau kings. In the early seventeenth century a

Minangkabau king was said to rule in the interior of Tiku and a King of Pagaruyung was also resident in the headwaters of the Inderagiri river at Kuantan. In the same period this, or another Minangkabau king, was recognised by Minangkabau migrants in the upper Batang Hari.

Whether one ruler inland appointed delegates in these areas, or as Pires suggested there were three kings, is not something we can determine from this shadowy evidence. What is clear is that Minangkabau's rulers had a presence in this period of Sumatran history. Van Basel, Marsden, Raffles and Newbold regarded Minangkabau as a once great kingdom which had extended over the whole of Sumatra, but then declined. In the early years of European contact, however, what we have found is less a picture of obscurity and decline, than one of continuity and flexibility. Perhaps Minangkabau was never dominant in the way of an Aceh, but rather, the benefits of Minangkabau kingship were extended across Sumatran communities in a more flexible way.

The rulers were seated inland and they were hidden from European eyes, but their influence was felt on the coastal fringe of the Minangkabau world. While the geographic spread of the Minangkabau royal presence in various regions of Sumatra may have encouraged early Europeans, like Michielsen, to think of the Minangkabau kings as imperial rulers, it may also suggest to us the existence of an unusually fluid and changing relationship between centre and periphery.

This theme continues to surface as we follow the European sources and turn to west Sumatra where the Dutch East India Company became more closely involved with the Minangkabau court. VOC reports provide a basis for probing the nature of relations between the inland kingdom and the periphery. They also help us to understand how Dutch expectations structured the character of the Company's relations with Minangkabau and the way in which VOC officials described the

kingdom.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TERRA INCOGNITA: CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS ON THE WEST COAST OF SUMATRA

The west coast of Sumatra, which the VOC began to approach with new interest in the 1660's, was a very different place from the eastern *rantau*. In east Sumatra the rivers flow slowly out into the straits of Melaka, winding their way from the heights of the *darat* through extended lowlands to marshy river mouths. On the west, by contrast, forested hills reach almost to the sea shore. The *pantai* (or coast) is a narrow, ribbon of cultivated land of varying width, extending up the length of the coast between mountains and sea.

On this side of the island streams tumble quickly to the coast and, in the main, it is rugged highland pathways rather than rivers which have provided a link between the high Minangkabau plateau and the coastal world. This does not mean that the relationship was not a close one. Minangkabau migrants moving outwards from the heartlands settled this coastal strip and the intermediate hills long before the Dutch arrived and enduring links were maintained between *darat* and *rantau* in the lineage ties through which every Minangkabau could trace their ancestry.

The west coast was also a lively trading environment. Over centuries west coast outlets for gold, camphor and benzoin, horses and later pepper had interacted with foreign merchants from India and the Middle East, exchanging these goods for salt, fine Indian cloth, Chinese silks and other products in demand in the populous high plateau. In the trading centres Minangkabau and other Malays mixed with Acehnese, Chinese, Javanese and settlers from further afield. The *rantau* was a Minangkabau environment, but it was more than this, it also provided a window on, and access to, a wider world.

Two periods of Acehese expansion, firstly in the middle of the sixteenth century and again from the beginning of the seventeenth, imposed a degree of external monopoly over this long strip of coast. When the new, European, monopolists arrived in west coast waters, therefore, they found that local trade was in the hands of Acehese delegates, Panglima, who were stationed at the major ports. Some groups appear to have prospered under the Acehese, but others resisted and, in the seventeenth century they looked to the European trading companies for help in withstanding Aceh.<sup>1</sup>

After the death of Aceh's most forceful king, Iskandar Muda, in 1636 the VOC negotiated preferential trading rights on the west coast from the new Queen of Aceh; Company servants also found opportunities to conduct unlicensed trade with west coast ports such as Tikou, Pariaman and Inderapura.<sup>2</sup> Then, in 1657, Dutch merchants received a request for help against Aceh from a Raja Lela representing the local rulers of Salido, Bayang and Batang Kapas in the southern part of the west coast.<sup>3</sup> Given the new Dutch "obsession" with gaining access to Sumatra's gold, this was too tempting to ignore and VOC officials decided to contest Aceh's hold over the west coast by forming an alliance with the southern *panghulu*.<sup>4</sup> An agreement was made between a Company representative, Jan van Groenewegen, and the anti-Acehese

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<sup>1</sup> In 1612 English East Indian Company merchants made brief mention of civil wars in Pariaman and in 1619 VOC servants received a request from an orangkaya there for help in ejecting the Acehese. A local force of four to five hundred thousand men was promised in this cause. Foster (ed), *Letters Received*, vol. I (1602-13) and Coen, *Bescheiden*, vol. 7, p. 397-401. A few years later a similar request was made to the Dutch by the ruler of Inderapura. *Dagh-Register*, vol. 19 (July 1625), p. 31, cited in, Kathirithamby-Wells, "Acehese Control", p. 460.

<sup>2</sup> This period is described in Kathirithamby-Wells, "Acehese Control", pp. 466-73.

<sup>3</sup> Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 31, see also Kathirithamby-Wells, "Achenese Control", pages 471 and 473 and W.J.A. de Leeuw, *Het Painansch Contract*, Chapters 2-4.

<sup>4</sup> The early years of this relationship have already been considered in several published studies. See, in particular, W.J.A. de Leeuw, *Het Painansch Contract*; Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*; and Kathirithamby-Wells, "Acehese Control". The term "obsession" is Kroeskamp's, *De Westkust*, p. 43.



leaders of Inderapura, Painan, Padang and Tiku. In Dutch records this came to be known as the Treaty of Painan and it formed the basis for a new period of domination on the west coast.<sup>5</sup>

Over the next five years the Dutch used military force to expel Acehese representatives from west Sumatra and attack Acehese vessels which ventured south of Singkel. Bit by bit the VOC moved up the coast signing agreements with well-disposed *panghulu* and stationing its own representatives in the trading centres in place of Acehese panglima. By 1665 they were, apparently, "masters" of the situation and the Acehese had been ejected. In reality this was just the beginning of the VOC's problems.

As the editors of the collected contracts of the VOC note,

In no other region of the Company's operations were so many sacred agreements sworn, violated and resworn as on the west coast of Sumatra.<sup>6</sup>

Extracting profits from the west Sumatran trade in gold and pepper was not as easy as the Dutch had imagined. During their tenure in west Sumatra the VOC encountered widespread local opposition. It was in these circumstances that the Company looked to the Minangkabau court inland as a source, not just of gold, but also of local authority. To appreciate the implications of that approach it is necessary to look more closely at why the Dutch were having so much trouble in west Sumatra.

West coast society was much more complex than it looked from the outside. So, too, was the impact of Acehese influence. In responding to the overtures of anti-Acehese *panghulu* the Company involved itself in an intricate world of local divisions;

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<sup>5</sup> The treaty was ratified in Batavia on 17 July 1663. The text of the contract made between the Company and the west coast chiefs can be found in J.E. Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum*, vol. II (1650-1675), *BKI*, vol. 87 (1931), pp. 252-55 and in de Leeuw, *Het Painansch Contract*, pp. 83-95.

<sup>6</sup> J.E. Heeres and F.W. Stapel (eds.), *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, vol. III, *BKI*, vol. 91 (1934) p. 423.

of lineage loyalties and trading interests. Into this complex situation the Dutch introduced indiscriminate force and a world view pervaded by regulations, prohibitions and legalistic contracts. These weapons only served to fragment what was already, in Dutch eyes, a "quarrelsome people". The reasons for these local tensions were several, but the most important was the division between two *laras*, or moieties, which was an integral part of Minangkabau society. These *laras*, Bodi Caniago and Koto Piliang, were originally formed from a combination of four *suku* (or matrilineal clans) Bodi, Caniago, Koto and Piliang. Later sub-division led to the creation of many more, affiliated, *suku*.<sup>7</sup>

### Suku and *Laras* Loyalties

Many of the west coast ports were originally settled by groups which migrated from the interior of Minangkabau and which gradually extended their *suku* into the *rantau* areas of the coast and the immediate hinterland.<sup>8</sup> The founding family in a newly opened area usually retained some precedence over settlers from other regions and other *suku* who had migrated to the new negeri.<sup>9</sup> *Panghulu* were chosen from among the lineage heads of the original groups of settlers and these represented their

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<sup>7</sup> De Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan*, p. 68 and Kato, *Matriliny and Migration*, pp. 47-50.

<sup>8</sup> One of the most detailed early descriptions of local social divisions is that of the VOC official Coenraad Frederik Hofman, written in 1715, which has been published by F.W. Stapel, in "Een Verhandeligen over het ontstaan van het Menangkabausche rijk en zijn Adat", *BKI*, vol. 42 (1935) pp. 461-6; both Dobbin (*Islamic Revivalism*, p. 80) and Rueb (*Het Westsumatraanse Goud Handel en Exploitatie in de Zeventiende Eeuw*, Unpublished thesis, University of Leiden, 1989, p. 32-3) cite the Stapel article on this point. Hofman's description of the original foundation of Padang by migrants from the interior is supported by local texts such as the *Tambo Negeri Padang* (see note 10 below). For a discussion of the context in which Hofman was writing and the influence this may have had on other aspects of his report see Chapter Eight below.

<sup>9</sup> *Nagari* in the interior, but usually given as *negeri* on the coast. For founding family precedence see De Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan*, p. 53.

*suku* in the government of the *negeri*. Settlement patterns and *suku* affiliation were, therefore, important criteria in determining status and social organization and these are remembered and recorded in local histories.

Local *Tambo* describe how various parts of the west coast were settled by members of a particular *laras* and *suku* divisions are also detailed.<sup>10</sup> The *Tambo* also show how the important intermediate hill regions, through which goods were brought to the coast, were settled by ancestors of the same grouping. These migrants brought with them a cultural life which already incorporated a philosophy of "friendly antagonism" and mutual competition, an ethos which manifested itself in the competitive relationship between the two *laras*.<sup>11</sup> The *Tambo Radja dan Loewaq Menangkabau*, for example, which describes the settlement of Tarusan, Padang and Barus, refers to the possibility of rivalry and disputes arising from the entry of Koto Piliang descendants into regions settled by members of Bodi Caniago.

### Laras and Trade

The development of pepper production in the second half of the sixteenth century probably stimulated migration and may have exacerbated these tensions.<sup>12</sup> Moreover the presence of external power brokers in the region, firstly in the shape of Aceh and later that of the Company, encouraged the tendency towards division in west coast society by elevating and formalising the status of some groups at the expense of

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, two texts held in the V.E. Korn collection: cat. no. 363 *Tambo Radja dan Loewaq Menangkabau serta Tambo Solok dengan Pasisir Rantau Padang Bujang Tarusan*; and cat. no. 343. *Tambo Negeri Padang*.

<sup>11</sup> On this relationship see Hofman's report, published in Stapel "Een Verhandeligen", p. 459-70 and De Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan*, pp. 71-82.

<sup>12</sup> Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 72.

others. As the editors of the *Corpus Diplomaticum* put it,

The many difficulties which the VOC encountered in this period were caused by the intricate nature of local society. This led to mutual conflict, sometimes also to mutual cooperation, very often to mutual intrigues against us.<sup>13</sup>

In at least one west coast port competition between ruling groups during and after the expulsion of Aceh was perceived by VOC servants to have been focussed around their pro- and anti- Acehnese sentiments.<sup>14</sup> While some local rulers saw their interests as being identified with Aceh there were also those who were keen to escape the net of Acehnese monopoly and who invited the VOC to become their trading partners and protectors on the west coast.<sup>15</sup> The displacement of pro-Acehnese groups caused resentment and opposition to the Company was to provoke friction and "rebellion" in the region for many years.

A recent study has pointed to the role of the two Minangkabau *laras* within the commercial networks which linked the coast and interior.<sup>16</sup> P.D. Rueb suggests that the arrival of the Company upset an existing equilibrium in the share which representatives of each *laras* took in the gold trade on the coast. This balance, she proposes, was the result of stimulated production in response to the Acehnese presence in west Sumatra which led to the development of new centres in the south west, in

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<sup>13</sup> *Corpus Diplomaticum*, vol. II p. 482.

<sup>14</sup> See for instance Dutch descriptions of the competition between the Raja di Hilir and Raja di Hulu families in Barus in the seventeenth centuries. At the time of the VOC first entry into Barus in 1668 the supporters of each royal house were divided into pro- and anti- Acehnese factions and it seems likely that Acehnese intervention in Barus helped to create an environment in which political authority was shared by these two rival families. Jane Drakard, *A Malay Frontier: Unity and Duality in a Sumatran Kingdom*, Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Project, 1990, pp. 30-2.

<sup>15</sup> In the 1660's the panghulus and inhabitants of Kota Tengah, for instance, were seen to be divided in their support of the Acehnese or the Dutch, Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p.87.

<sup>16</sup> Rueb, *Het Westsumatraanse Goud*, p. 32.

regions such as Sungai Paguh and Duapuluh Kota.<sup>17</sup> The territory lying between these regions and the coast was dominated by members of the Bodi Caniago grouping which gave members of that group an important new role in the gold trade. When the Dutch arrived they displaced pro-Acehnese *panghulu* belonging to this Bodi Caniago network who had acted as intermediaries between the Acehnese and the gold producers of the southern gold mining regions. By initiating direct contact with the Dutch, Rueb suggests, the Kota Piliang Bendahara of Sungai Tarab further alienated these Bodi Caniago representatives and further intensified friction between the two groups.<sup>18</sup>

This plausible scenario helps to explain the fierce competition between certain groups on the west coast during the VOC period. There may be difficulties, however, with linking *laras* affiliation too strictly to geographical location in this period. It was, for instance a group of rulers in the southern ports of the Sapuluh Buah Bandar who sought protection from Aceh and release from the trade monopoly under which they were forced to send their goods to the northern ports.<sup>19</sup> As the *Tambo Radja dan Loewaq Menangkabau* and the *Tambo Negeri Padang* indicate, settlers belonging to both *laras* coexisted in the coastal regions. They were probably always in a state of some conflict and this must have been exacerbated by the changes involved in Company control. Other tensions surrounding the VOC's arrival in west Sumatra were provoked by the encounter between two very different cultures. Among the things

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<sup>17</sup> Dobbin emphasises the change took place in the mid-sixteenth century with the introduction of pepper to the west coast, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> On this conflict, see also J. Kathirithamby-Wells, "Myth and Reality: Minangkabau institutional traditions in the rantau", in L.L. Thomas and F. von Benda-Beckmann, *Change and Continuity in Minangkabau*, Athens: Ohio University, 1985, p. 127.

<sup>19</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells, "Acehnese Control", p. 460 and p.469 and de Leeuw, *Het Painansch Contract*, pp. 12-5. Earlier offers had already been made by Tikur, Pariaman and Inderapura Kathirithamby-Wells, "Acehnese Control", p. 469.

which Dutchmen and local Malays appear to have approached in a different way was is the whole area of agreement and contracts.

### Contract and Perjanjian

Contract was the mechanism which the Dutch chose to use to consolidate their position in west Sumatra. Since so many contracts were made, broken and renewed on the west coast it is worth focussing briefly on the cultural expectations which the signatories brought to these alliances and to question how contract worked as a means of bridging the cultural encounter between Europeans and locals.

The initial agreements made between Groenewegen and the anti-Acehnese leaders of Inderapura, Painan, Padang and Tikú.<sup>20</sup> This was the model for all subsequent contracts used to extend the Company's sphere and to reassert control over those whose loyalty had lapsed. The provisions in the agreement were heavily weighted in the VOC's interests and were drawn up at a time when some west coast groups were desperate to be free of Acehnese control. The Company was guaranteed exclusive rights to west coast trade and the right to set the price of gold. All trade outside the Company's control was considered to be smuggling. The Dutch were not required to pay any tolls except for the traditional *ruba-ruba* or anchorage charge. The local population was offered protection, but only on the coast and not from any inland threat. A general council (*raad*), composed of local and VOC representative was to be set up to adjudicate any differences between the Company and locals.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The text of this contract, which was ratified in Batavia on 17 July 1663, can be found in J.E. Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum*, vol. II (1650-1675), *BKI*, vol. 87 (1931), pp. 252-55 and de Leeuw, *Het Painansch Contract*, pp. 83-95. The question of contractual relations between the inhabitants of west Sumatra and the VOC is also discussed briefly in Rueb, *Het Westsumatraanse Goud Handel*, pp. 34-5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

This was considered by the Dutch to be an eternal and unbreakable alliance (*eeuwig en onverbreeklyck verbond*)<sup>22</sup> and its provisions, most of which ran counter to local interests, were enforced to the letter, frequently by military means. Deviations from these written contracts were regarded by VOC servants as evidence of the deceitful character of the local population and, in the book-keeping style of the Company, the contracts which were gathered in Batavia in Contract Books were cited in VOC documents to justify the Company's subsequent actions.<sup>23</sup>

This approach, in which contracts worked as an absolute guarantee of interests, and a justification for their defence, was quite unlike the way in which agreements and contracts seem to have been understood locally.<sup>24</sup> Oaths (*sumpah*) and agreements (*perjanjian*) appear to have long been important in Sumatran political thinking. Early Sumatran inscriptions contain curses which threatened terrible retribution for subjects who offended, and the Minangkabau kings themselves were custodians of an awesome curse, the Bisa Kawi, which, up to the nineteenth century, was still believed to be effective. Local sources often depict oaths being used to affirm an alliance or an agreement. The point about these sworn compacts, however, was that they rested upon a mutually held belief in their sacred power.<sup>25</sup> After the acceptance

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<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, *Dagh-Register*, vol. 14 (1663), p. 88.

<sup>23</sup> Some of these survive in the archives. See, for instance, Republic of Indonesia, Arsip Negara, SWK [*Sumatra's Westkust*] 28, *Contractbundel SWK 1666-85*.

<sup>24</sup> For a reference to the resentment caused by these unequal contracts see Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, Vol. V (1686), p. 67. For an observation on the differences between a Malay and a Dutch approach to the idea of contract see Donald Goudie, *Syair Perang Siak*, Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS, 1989, p. 30. Leonard Andaya has undertaken a detailed analysis of the differing assumptions which locals and Europeans brought to contractual relations in south Sulawesi, "Treaty Conceptions and Misconceptions: A Case Study from South Sulawesi", *BKI*, vol. 134 (1978) 2 & 3, pp. 275-95.

<sup>25</sup> For reference to inscriptional evidence see J.G. de Casparis, *Selected Inscriptions from the 7th to the 9th Centuries*, Bandung, 1956, pp. 1-36 and J. Miksic, "Classical Archaeology in Sumatra", *Indonesia*, vol.30, (1980), pp.43-4. The Minangkabau curse, *besi kawi* is mentioned in Chapters Seven and Nine below and in Chapter One above.

of Islam oaths were sworn in the sight of Allah, who was evoked as the ultimate guarantor of sincerity and justice.<sup>26</sup> An oath, or contract, sworn with unbelievers was unlikely, therefore, to have had the same profound significance for a Sumatran Muslim, and may even have come with its own built-in conceptual escape clause as an unholy alliance.<sup>27</sup>

More than this, the legalistic approach taken by the VOC towards the enforcement of contracts ran counter to their function in local society. In Minangkabau society a particular emphasis was placed upon *mufakat* (agreement, consensus), and this was an important means by which hostility between the *laras* was reduced. Discussion and deliberation, consensus and agreement are key concepts in which as much emphasis is placed upon process as upon result. Tensions are diffused and incompatibilities recognized in this process. In local literature, deliberation and consensus are depicted as a source of pleasure and satisfaction to the participants, and local texts are often saturated with language which emphasizes mutuality and reciprocity.<sup>28</sup> *Mufakat* was a mechanism which was suited to the resolution of conflict in a society which was riven with oppositional tendencies and local conflicts were frequently subject to a cycle of resolution, disintegration and renewed resolution. This was very different from the VOC's emphasis upon the letter of the law and the fine print of their eternal treaties.

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<sup>26</sup> Oaths were often used as a test in legal cases over which Allah was considered the final arbiter. A brief discussion of the use of oaths in Sumatran society can be found in Drakard, *A Malay Frontier*, p. 181. See also F.W. Stapel, "Een Verhandeling", pp. 459-470.

<sup>27</sup> In a report from 1682 one Dutch official remarked that the local people were disinclined to enter into contracts with the Dutch who were considered to be "unbelievers and heretics". SWK 1683 VOC 1377, f. 1073v.

<sup>28</sup> See Taufik Abdullah, "Modernization in the Minangkabau World", in C. Holt (ed.) *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972, p.190-1; "Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau", *Indonesia*, vol.2 (1966), pp.1-24; and also Drakard, *A Malay Frontier*, *passim*.



## Representation

There were contrasting approaches, too, to the whole question of representation which arises when one considers the question of contract. The Company was a hierarchical and intensely bureaucratic structure within which delegation was formalized and the action of delegates was reported to and ratified by the Governor General and ultimately by the seventeen directors in Amsterdam. West Sumatran coastal societies of the seventeenth century, however, were not always represented in this direct and authoritative way. The coastal rajas who entered into contractual obligations with the VOC did not always have an ultimate control over their own communities, and their ability to command was tempered by the influence of *panghulu suku* (lineage chiefs) and the trading interests of powerful *orangkaya*.<sup>29</sup> In Bengkulu, one English East India Company servant complained that "we dayly finde that the kings have noe command over their people and noe difference to be found between king and subjects".<sup>30</sup> Deliberation and the voice of the community, the *gemeente* (or political public) as the Dutch called it, was an important feature of political life in west Sumatra.<sup>31</sup> In these circumstances it was far less easy than the Company imagined to

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<sup>29</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. IV, p. 161 and SWK 1668 VOC 1264, f. 290v. See also Michielsen's comments on the rajas of the empat suku in Kambang, Palangei, Lakitan and Air Haji. According to him, these rajas had little individual influence in their own *negeri* where the *panghulu* had the power. Acting together, owever, the four rajas could take judicial decisions, cited in Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 75.

<sup>30</sup> Fragment of a letter from Bengkulu to Inderapura written in 1685, published in P. Wink, "Eenige achiefstukken betreffende de vestiging van de Engelsche factorij te Benkoelen in 1685", *TBG*, vol. LXIV (1924), pp. 477. For other comments of the same nature see De Leeuw, *Het Painansch Contract*, p. 17; Nahuis *Brieven over Bencoolen, Padang, het Rijk van Menangkabau*, p. 145; and O.L. Helfrich, "De Adel van Bengkoelen en Djambi (1892-1901)", *Adatrechtbundels*, vol. 22 (1923), pp. 309.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance SWK 1666 VOC 1253, f. 1360 also cited in Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 49. For a reference to the influence of the *gemeente* in Barus at the time of first VOC contact and their defiance of the rajas of Barus see Drakard, *A Malay Frontier*, pp. 28-30.

hold individual rulers as community representatives and to bind them in rigid contracts.<sup>32</sup>

The Dutch referred to most political representatives on the west coast as *regenten*<sup>33</sup>, which appears to have been synonymous with the local term *panghulu*.<sup>34</sup> VOC sources also mention individual rulers, Raja and Yang Dipertuan, in the coastal regions but, by the time the Company arrived, former royal centres such as Pariaman and Tiku appear to have been in decline. A tension seems to have existed in west Sumatra between the more egalitarian traditions of the interior and a tendency towards sovereignty vested in individuals in the coastal regions. At each end of the *pesisir*, in Barus and Inderapura, recognisable royal establishments did exist in the seventeenth century, but in both ports royal authority was limited, to some extent by community opinion. In Inderapura an extended struggle took place between the ruling dynasty and the *menteri* (or ministers) and in Barus royal authority was circumscribed by a forceful *gemeente*.<sup>35</sup> It is likely that these tensions were part and parcel of the

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<sup>32</sup> P. D. Rueb points out that the contracts which the Company made with west coast raja ignored the influence of the Acehese faction, *Het Westsumatraanse Goud Handel*, pp. 34-5. Kathirithamby-Wells also comments upon the imbalance inherent in the contracts signed between the VOC and the west coast rajas in "Acehese Control", pp. 476-7.

<sup>33</sup> Literally "governor", *regent* was a term which the Dutch often used in different parts of the archipelago to refer to a variety of local positions.

<sup>34</sup> As we have seen, *panghulu* in west Sumatra were usually descendants of the founding families in an area. But this function was also mixed with that of *orangkaya*, the wealthy merchants who acted as entrepreneurs and middle men in the ports. See Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 71-87 for a description of this coastal brokerage system and the role of the *orang kaya* in sponsoring trade with foreign merchants and acting as intermediaries with people of the interior. C.F. Hofman, an early eighteenth century Dutch official, described the government of Padang as consisting of two sets of four *Panghulu* who represented the suku of two groups of settlers in Padang from different parts of the Minangkabau interior. Stapel, "Een Verhandeligen" pp. 466-7; also cited in Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 80.

<sup>35</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells, "The Inderapura Sultanate", pp. 64-84. The general structure of governmental relations on the west coast is discussed on p. 77. See also Drakard, *A Malay Frontier*, pp. 28-30.

divisions within west coast society,<sup>36</sup> the product, perhaps, of the coalescence of Minangkabau social forms with a more mixed Malay community on the coast.<sup>37</sup>

## Dutch Intervention

VOC policies and attitudes towards west Sumatra were shaped by preconceived notions, by policy directives from Amsterdam and by the individual personalities of Company servants as well as the actual contact they had with Sumatrans.<sup>38</sup> It is on the one hand axiomatic that there should be important differences of perspective between seventeenth century Dutchmen and Sumatrans and on the other hand it is easy to draw too sharp a contrast. Nevertheless there was an obvious cultural gulf and important differences of interest between the Dutch and most local Sumatrans.

The cultural distance existing between seventeenth century Dutchmen and Sumatrans is expressed in the contempt with which the Dutch regarded local cultural expressions. This was reaction which led on many occasions to the Europeans misreading local signs. An expression of this contemptuous attitude can be found in J. L. van Basel's eighteenth century summary of the VOC attitudes. Sumatran learning, he claimed, consisted of reading or chanting from Malay books "filled with fables and

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<sup>36</sup> It is often stated, for instance, that Koto Piliang *adat* is more aristocratic in character, while Bodi Caniago *adat* is considered to be more egalitarian. While such differences in the origin of coastal settlers may have effected political traditions in different parts of the *peisisir* this question is beyond the scope of the present study.

<sup>37</sup> On the character of the Malay coastal world and of distinctions between the *peisisir* and the *darat* see my discussion of Minangkabau Malay society in west Sumatra in *A Malay Frontier*, pp. 10-12.

<sup>38</sup> On interaction between Dutch East India Company officials and local groups in the archipelago see Barbara Andaya's comments in, "Melaka under the Dutch, 1641-1795", in Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley (eds.) *Melaka*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1983 p. 222. This topic is also discussed in a recent work on Java, M.C. Ricklefs, *War, Culture and Economy in Java: Asian and European Imperialism in the Early Kartasura period*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993, Introduction.

trifles", as well as "superstitious traditions and ridiculous ceremonies". Their religion was the "doctrine of Mohammed", but in this they were but poorly educated and they adulterated it with many "foolish superstitions, ceremonies and talismans against bad luck and sickness". Their greatest prize, he wrote, consisted of a kris with a golden handle and the most important of their ceremonies lay in the carrying of a large sunshade which was used to accompany only "chiefs and statesmen".<sup>39</sup>

The inhabitants of the new Dutch Republic were predisposed to be impatient with the ceremonial life of the Malay population. Displays of pomp and ceremony which were integral to the ritual life of Southeast Asian kingdoms were despised. According to Roman de Hooghe in his *Spiegel van Staat der Vereenigde Nederlanden* "The differences between these lands [and other states] is most singular; glory in other lands reposing in an outward show of flags but here in the manner of thrifty and modest households; elsewhere there is honour in the free spending of money...here there is honour in having no debts."<sup>40</sup> The Dutch, as Schama puts it, "respected commerce rather than nobility" and exhibited a marked "distaste for superstition".<sup>41</sup>

Materially there was immediate friction between the locals and the Dutch. In the early days the "greedy" captains of Company ships are said to have acted brutally, holding up and robbing local boats even when the owners had the required passes.<sup>42</sup> Official policy prohibited the local population from producing salt which had always

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<sup>39</sup> See E.B. Kielstra's summary of Van Basel's manuscript in E.B. Kielstra, "Onze Kennis van Sumatras Westkust, omstreeks de helft der Achttiende Eeuw", *BKI*, 36 (1887), pp. 508-9. A.C. Milner discusses the importance of ceremony in Malay political culture in *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press for the Association of Asian Studies, 1982), passim.

<sup>40</sup> Cited by Simon Schama in *The Embarrassment of Riches. An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, USA: Fontana Press, 1987 p. 53. Editorial changes and translation are Schama's.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Van Basel, "Begin en Voortgang", p. 22.

been an important item of trade with the interior. Local cotton growing was also prohibited in order to prevent competition with the Company's textile trade.<sup>43</sup> In addition to the right which the Company had claimed, by contract, to set the price of gold, they also changed the rate of a *bahar* of pepper to the disadvantage of local producers. Passes were required for any local boats engaged in regional trade and the west coast waters came under virtual Company control.

Dutch interference had an immediate impact in this coastal world. The VOC replaced existing rajas and lineage chiefs with pro-Dutch appointees and caused widespread resentment by ignoring the precedence of founding families.<sup>44</sup> The position of Orangkaya Kecil was a particular bone of contention in west Sumatra. This Koto Piliang *panghulu* cooperated with the VOC who promoted him to the newly invented position of Panglima Raja or deputy Governor over the Company's west coast possessions.<sup>45</sup> He came to act as a key intermediary between the VOC administration and the local population.<sup>46</sup> This promotion and the influence the Panglima Raja accumulated through his service to the Company was to cause considerable resentment towards him among other west coast rajas.

Another cause of resentment was the promotion of Padang at the expense of other, older, ports. After the initial signing of the Treaty of Painan in 1663 with the rulers of Inderapura, Tikus, Padang and Painan Pulau Cinko served as the Company's

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<sup>43</sup> See, for instance, *Dagh-Register*, vol. 16, pp. 239-40.

<sup>44</sup> See, for instance, Stapel, "Een Verhandeling", pp. 459-70.

<sup>45</sup> The *laras* affiliation of Orang Kaya Kecil is mentioned in Hofman's report, published by Stapel, "Een Verhandelingen", p. 467 and in the *Tambo Padang* mentioned above. The position of Panglima Raja was in part an extension of the office of Panglima instituted under the Acehnese, but the Panglima Raja at Padang came to have much more extensive influence as a result of VOC patronage and military power.

<sup>46</sup> Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, pp. 106-7. and 114-6. See also Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 80-1.

principal trading office on the west coast.<sup>47</sup> This island post was fortified and was intended as a potential refuge for the Company's officers should they be obliged to withdraw from the mainland.<sup>48</sup> Local *panghulu* from Padang, however, requested that the office which had been established there in 1664 be promoted and, after the Dutch came into conflict with the district of Pauh, Padang was made the VOC administrative centre in 1666.<sup>49</sup>

Padang was Groenewegen's preferred residence on the west coast because of what was considered to be its comparatively healthy climate, its central position and the fact that the locals were well disposed towards the Dutch.<sup>50</sup> The majority of the Padang *panghulu* were said to be anxious to trade with the Company and to be released from Acehnese domination. Significantly, Padang had much less to lose than other west coast ports. Unlike Tiku and Pariaman, it was not mentioned as a significant trading centre in the sixteenth century.<sup>51</sup> Both these ports were under the command of Acehnese panglima and, although representatives from Pariaman and Tiku had attempted to make contact with the Dutch, a large number of the population appear to have supported the Acehnese administration. As "pro-Acehnese" strongholds both Tiku and Pariaman came under attack from the Dutch and suffered while Padang prospered.

Padang also lay between two significant intermediate centres for the passage of

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<sup>47</sup> De Leeuw, *De Painansch Contract*, pp. 43-5 and J.E. Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, vol. 2 pp. 251-5. See also E.B. Kielstra, "Onze Kennis", p. 528.

<sup>48</sup> Kielstra, "Onze Kennis", pp. 549-50 and Macleod, "De Oost-Indische Compagnie" (1904, II) pp.2266-7.

<sup>49</sup> Prominent among these panghulu was Orangkaya Kecil, who had been involved in early negotiations with the Dutch and who had travelled to Batavia with Groenewegen and other west coast representatives in 1663 where the first contracts were confirmed. *Dagh-Register*, vol. 14 (1663), pp. 91-2 and p. 137.

<sup>50</sup> Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 50.

<sup>51</sup> Cortesão, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, vol. I, pp. 160-1.

pepper and gold from the interior. These were Pauh, some 6 kilometres inland from Padang, and Kota Tengah which lay on the road between Padang and Pariaman. Pauh was the collection centre for goods passing down-hill from the Solok plain and for those travelling via the Limau Manis route from the interior. Kota Tengah was the first important coastal centre reached by merchants using the Anai pass route from Tanah Datar and other regions of the interior.<sup>52</sup> The promotion of Padang under the Dutch interfered with the trading roles of Pauh and Kota Tengah, both of which were to become centres of fierce opposition to the Company.

Resistance to the VOC was almost instantaneous and Tiku was perceived as a centre of opposition from which the Acehnese inhabitants fled inland. A Dutch military force was sent to the west coast in 1664 under Jacob Cau, and the Acehnese and their local supporters were driven out of Salido, Tiku, Pariaman and Pulau Cinko.<sup>53</sup> Company servants used the spectre of "Acehnese interference" to explain this disaffection, but the intrusive brutality of VOC tactics in west Sumatra must also have been a powerful motive. Aceh was also much more than an external political power in west Sumatra. However fearful locals may have been of overt aggression from the north, and resentful of the trading monopoly, Aceh was also an important source of cultural and religious influence. There is little doubt that Aceh played an important part in the dissemination and development of Islamic faith in west Sumatra. A recognised religious centre such as Ulakan had numerous Acehnese residents whose expulsion by the Dutch provoked outrage. Verspreet, who became Commissaris and

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<sup>52</sup> See Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 71.

<sup>53</sup> See the written report of Cau's activity on the west coast in SWK 1665 VOC 1249, ff. 138-154.

military commander of the west coast, described Ulakan as "having a great name".<sup>54</sup> The population, he noted, were "fanatically Muslim" and very inclined towards the Acehnese.<sup>55</sup>

## Cultural Encounters

Not surprisingly relations between the Dutch and the inhabitants of west Sumatra were marked by cross cultural misunderstandings. The Company record appears, in places, to depict mutually incomprehensible terms of conduct. In 1665, for instance, a Dutch official and two soldiers were "massacred" on the beach at Tiku in full view of their vessel, after they had come ashore in response to a white flag which had been waved on the beach. Groenewegen, the Dutch Commander at this time, sacked and burnt Tiku in revenge for this outrage against European etiquette in warfare.<sup>56</sup> Yet shortly after this a small Dutch military force approaching a local fortification at Pauh, shot and killed a local defender who had mounted the walls waving a white flag. On this occasion the inexperienced Dutch officer responsible had utterly ignored important aspects of Malay etiquette in refusing to engage in consultation ("*pitcharing*" or *bicara*) before the attack and ignoring the religious

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<sup>54</sup> SWK 1668 VOC 1264, f. 278r., also Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 101. Verspreet arrived in August. Ulakan was reported to be the religious centre from which Islam first spread on the west coast and in the interior.

<sup>55</sup> Kroeskamp, *Ibid*, p. 88. There is also evidence to suggest that Barus too was an important centre of Islamic learning in the second half of the sixteenth century and may have been home, in the first half of the seventeenth century, to a group of religious scholars who were exiles from the religious persecution of Nuru'l-Din al-Raniri in Aceh. Drakard, "An Indian Ocean Port", p. 73.

<sup>56</sup> A detailed account of this event can be found in Groenewegen's letter to the Governor-General in Batavia written on the 9th March 1665, SWK 1666 VOC 1252, ff. 77-8. The same account can be found in N. Macleod, "De Oost-Indische Compagnie op Sumatra in de 17e eeuw", *IG*, vol II (1904), pp. 1271-2. It is also summarised by J. L. van Basel in "Begin en Voortgang van Onzen Handel en Bezittingen op Sumatra's Westkust", *TNI*, 1847, pp. 21-2.



objections of the local *panghulu* to engaging in warfare on a Friday.<sup>57</sup> His troop was, itself, trapped in the sodden rice fields and slaughtered by the Pauh defenders.

The full dynamics of both events are hidden from us but the white flag is an intriguing sign because we cannot be sure that it always held the same values for Sumatrans and Europeans. In the Tiku incident the possibility exists that the local people saw it in different terms from those of the Dutchmen anchored offshore. In European eyes the white flag was an emblem of truce or surrender and it appears to have been read as such in this instance. A similar value is placed upon the use of a white flag in Malay culture. R.J. Wilkinson in his well known and authoritative *Malay-English Dictionary* defines it as a sign of truce or surrender (*takluk*) and cites two examples from Malay texts where the sign was read in this way.<sup>58</sup> In Groenewegen's report of the incident, however, the flag is described as a white "vaantjen" - a pennon or lance flag - rather than as a "vaan" - flag or banner - which may imply a more ambiguous and warlike intention. Interestingly, Wilkinson cites a further, seemingly contradictory, Malay definition of a white banner or "bendera putih alam baginda" which he reads as a white flag showing independent sovereignty.

We know from the Company archives what sort of epithets and insults were used by VOC servants to describe the Malays they encountered. The west coast population were an "unreliable and quarrelsome people"<sup>59</sup>, given to "perfidious

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<sup>57</sup> SWK 1666 VOC 1258, ff. 2128-9 and ff. 2134-6. These events are summarised in Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 68 Ibid., and also by N. Macleod "De Oost-Indische Compagnie op Sumatra in de 17e eeuw", *Indische Gids*, (1904), p. 1272.

<sup>58</sup> R.J. Wilkinson, *A Malay-English Dictionary (Romanised)*, (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1959), sv. *bendera*, p. 117 where *bendera puteh tanda tundok* is said to signify "white flag as a sign of surrender" in the *Hikayat Bugis*. *Bendera puteh alam baginda* is cited here too, but without any reference to its use in specific works of literature. Under *tunggul* on p. 1251, Wilkinson refers to the use of *tunggul puteh* as a white flag of surrender in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*.

<sup>59</sup> "De strandvolckeren ter westcuste een gants ongeposeert en querelleus volq is", cited in Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. IV p. 66 from KA 1196, f.70r-v.

fickleness"<sup>60</sup>, they possessed "deceitful natures"<sup>61</sup> and "acted fraudulently".<sup>62</sup> Dutch officials referred to the "forest creatures" of Pauh<sup>63</sup>, the "faint-hearted" people of Kota Tengah<sup>64</sup> and the "untrustworthy" inhabitants of Tiku and Pariaman.<sup>65</sup> Reflecting considerable insecurity, this discourse reveals more than anything how ambivalent Company servants were in their attempts to bind the local population to them by means of caveat and treaty. What the Malays thought of their new "allies" is harder to determine, although an expression of mocking defiance can be seen in the VOC complaints about the behaviour of the Kota Tengah "rabble", as the VOC called it, after the defeat of the Dutch military attack on Pauh, described above. The chiefs remained loyal, according to Michielsen, but the "rabble" ridiculed the Company by displaying their Acehnese and Pauh enemies openly in the street. They taunted the Dutch by wearing the uniforms of fallen Dutch soldiers.<sup>66</sup>

Opposition towards the Company grew during 1666 and the west coast *negeri* were still in considerable turmoil. Anti-Dutch protest on the west coast is frequently described in the VOC records as having a "Muslim" character and religious feeling against the Europeans appears to have strengthened the Acehnese link in anti-Company activities. In response to the still troubled situation in the west coast *negeri*, Verspreet led a second military onslaught in the course of which Pauh was destroyed by fire. Ulakan was also destroyed and its population scattered. The Bugis soldier,

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<sup>60</sup> "Trouwlooze veranderlijkheid", van Basel, "Begin en Voortgang", p. 21.

<sup>61</sup> "Maar de regeering den bedriegelijken aard der sumatranen niet vertrouwen", Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>62</sup> The first Dutchmen to trade in west Sumatra described the Malays of Pariaman, Tiku and Pasaman as "bedriegelijk" - deceitful or fraudulent, Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 14.

<sup>63</sup> Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 41.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 51

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>66</sup> SWK 1666 VOC 1258, f. 2143.

Raja Palaka, was made "koning" of Ulakan and an Ambonese mercenary fighting for the Company, Captain Jonker or Raja Ambon, was made panglima of Pariaman Hilir, with the right to exact the tribute which had previously been paid to the Acehnese.<sup>67</sup> Optimistically Verspreet described the west coast population as having been restored to a "goed devotie".<sup>68</sup>

It was in the context of these chaotic attempts to control the different factions of west Sumatran society that Dutch officials first came into contact with the Minangkabau royal family. The overwhelming *raison d'être* behind the Dutch presence in West Sumatra was, of course, commercial. But, in order to ensure the passage of goods into the VOC lodge, a degree of peace and order was seen to be necessary. It was the quest to ensure harmonious conditions which led the VOC more and more deeply into the politics of west Sumatra and provoked its representatives into a relentless tinkering with the social and political life of the people. This level of interference was a precarious exercise which provoked numerous outbursts of hostility against the Company and exacerbated existing social tensions. Despite its liberal use of armed force, the territory controlled by the Company and its local allies was limited. For most of the seventeenth century period of VOC trade on the west coast the Company barely controlled Pauh, a mere 6-8 kilometres inland from Padang. This looseness in the Company's grip over the coast should be borne in mind as we consider encounters between the VOC and the interior of Sumatra.

### Terra Incognita

The physical shape of west Sumatra is important in thinking about this

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<sup>67</sup> Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 88.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

relationship. The Bukit Barisan mountain range which stretches nearly the length of the island reaches close to the shore along the west Sumatran coast. At Padang the coastal flat gives way to foothills only ten kilometres from the shore and via both the Anai pass and the Limau Manis routes inland the ascent steepens quickly. The mountains impose upon the coast a constant reminder of a different territory inland. Sometimes hazy blue, at others grey or covered with cloud, the mountains enclose and seem to protect the interior; they graphically mark the division between inland and coastal worlds. Thomas Best remarked on this landscape in 1613. On viewing the "hie land" of Pasaman, just north of Tiku, he noted that the

mountaine is very hie, and riseth like Mungevell or Mount Etnea in Sicilia. This a very hie and goodlie mountaine; and the 2 hye[sic] hills of Priaman is also very hie land.<sup>69</sup>

In Southeast Asia mountains were considered to be a locus of power and spiritual strength. In the seventeenth century one Minangkabau king described himself as ruler "under the clouds of Minangkabau".<sup>70</sup> But for the newly arrived inhabitants of the low countries these mountains must have looked imposing indeed and those who lived beyond them appeared to be different from the coastal population. They were "Manacabers", "bergmen" or "bergluiden".<sup>71</sup>

The interior remained, as Kroeskamp puts it, "*terra incognita*" for the Dutch until the late nineteenth century and none of the embassies sent inland during the seventeenth century included a Dutchman.<sup>72</sup> This is extraordinary considering the

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<sup>69</sup> W. Foster (ed.), *The Voyage of Thomas Best to the East Indies 1612-14*, London: Hakluyt Society, 1934, p. 62.

<sup>70</sup> Dagh-Register, vol. 18 (1668-9), p. 276, see also SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f.1038v. see Chapter Five below.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, SWK 1666 VOC 1252, f. 1013 and SWK 1668 VOC 1264, f. 288r.

<sup>72</sup> Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 157. Apart from journey to the Minangkabau interior undertaken in 1684 by the mestizo Portuguese Thomas Dias, the first European who is known to have visited Minangkabau was Raffles in 1818. The expedition led by Dias is discussed

intimate concern that Company officials had with Minangkabau trade during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in both east and west Sumatra. Despite frequent urgings from the Heeren XVII in Amsterdam and mention of proposed Dutch embassies in the Overgecomen Brieven from west Sumatra no such expedition took place and there are not even very energetic attempts made, in the early records, to discern the political and social shape of the inland world.

Perhaps the notion of "*incognita*" should be considered here not just in physical terms, but also conceptually. Would not the very mountains have been seen as alien to a people who had come from the flatness of the Dutch republic and might this unfamiliar landscape have added a mental barrier to what were clearly important physical ones? James Boon has written of the domesticated image of Bali which was constructed by early Dutch travellers. "Bali-tje" or "dear little Bali", as Boon quips, reminded the Dutch, it is suggested, of their own flooded meadows.<sup>73</sup> Mountains, on the other hand, especially in the density with which they occur in west Sumatra, may not have seemed so reassuring.

The representation of "natural" landscape as we know it today was developed by the Dutch landscape painters of the early seventeenth century when the representation of nature in Dutch painting moved from the formulae of Renaissance models of landscape to a concentration on what are now seen as more credible, harmonious and "naturalistic" scenes. The earlier style is marked in the work of the sixteenth century Antwerp painters such as Joachim Patinir, Herri met de Bles, Cornelis Massys and Pieter Bruegel the Elder. In the work of these artists mountain

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## Chapter Five.

<sup>73</sup> James A. Boon, *The Anthropological Romance of Bali 1597-1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 10 and pp. 15-6. For an English response to the "geometry" of the Dutch landscape see Aldous Huxley, "Views of Holland", in *Along the Road. Notes and Essays of a Tourist*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1930, pp. 104-16.

outcrops were painted in accordance with ideal landscape formulae derived from Italian Renaissance models. Mountains were not harmoniously familiar to these painters who followed the style of southern schools and depicted stylized mountains and fantastic craggy rocks in biblical scenes.<sup>74</sup> Christopher Brown suggests that such painters demonstrated a "remarkable intensity of response" to mountainous scenes which may bespeak their unfamiliarity as features of the natural world. When an artist like Pieter Bruegel the Elder visited the Alps, for instance, he is said to have "swallowed all the mountains and rocks and spat them out again...on his canvases and panels".<sup>75</sup>

Certainly the Dutch encountered mountains elsewhere in Indonesia, but not often in situations where they were obliged to deal with a populous and reputedly warlike population who could only be approached by entering the mountains, and who controlled the trade in which the Company wished to participate.<sup>76</sup> Seventeenth century Dutchmen do not appear to have been entirely comfortable with mountains and hills and they responded to them uncertainly. In the context of seventeenth century west Sumatran history this discomfort with an unfamiliar landscape may have contributed to the ambivalence with which VOC servants regarded the ruler of the cloud covered mountains. To stretch the allusion, the fantastical associations of rocks

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<sup>74</sup> See Christopher Brown's introduction to *Dutch Landscape: The early years. Haarlem and Amsterdam 1590-1650*, (London: The national Gallery, 1986), pp. 13-8.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 16. On the fascination which the Flemish painters of the sixteenth century had for mountains see Walter S. Gibson, *"Mirror of the Earth": The World Landscape in Sixteenth Century Flemish Painting*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, pp. 54-6. Of Breugel, Gibson remarks that in his last years he "descended from the strange, alien, world of the Alps to the more comfortable landscape of his homeland", p. 74.

<sup>76</sup> An obvious example of a seventeenth century expedition inland to mountainous territory is the forced march inland to Kedhiri undertaken by VOC troops in 1678. A description of the rigours of this journey can be found in Ricklefs, *War, Culture and Economy*, Chapter Two. The Mataram expedition involved some 2,300 VOC troops, a force which the Padang establishment would never have been able to rival. East Java and west Sumatra are, also, very different landscapes. In the Javanese case the interior was approached from the relatively flatter north coast, whereas in Padang the mountains were immediately and precipitously present.

and hills in sixteenth to seventeenth century landscapes of the catholic south may help us to understand the distrust with which the mercantile and newly liberated Dutchmen of the VOC viewed a seemingly mystical and ineffectual king in the mountains.

Strandbound, mentally and well as physically, Company servants regarded the interior with mistrust as well as greed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### IN THE KING'S NAME

In 1665 the VOC establishment at Padang made its first contact with the Minangkabau interior and began to exchange letters with representatives of the court. Company servants were anxious to turn the situation in west Sumatra to their commercial advantage as quickly as possible and the reputation of the Minangkabau king as lord over the gold lands encouraged them to seek his help in facilitating the flow of gold to the coast. The interaction was by no means unambiguous. At times the Dutch thought that they were writing to the king when, in fact, their letters were reaching the Bendahara of Sungai Tarab who replied in the king's name. At other times their communications appear to have reached a figure who was actually regarded as the king of the interior.

The information which began to emerge as the Company became more involved with the interior suggested that the king's position was not that of an autocrat such as Iskandar Muda of Aceh, and some later historians have concluded that the king of Minangkabau was "completely in the background" politically.<sup>1</sup> This view will be explored in the pages which follow. It will be argued that the role of the king was, in fact, a critical element in the political order of Minangkabau and its *rantau*. The obvious actors in west coast politics during the 1660's may have been the Bendahara of Sungai Tarab, the Panglima Raja and the VOC, but the political language which they used was a language of royal authority. They acted in terms of the king. And, for their part, the Dutch, in exploiting Minangkabau royal rhetoric for their own ends, were to discover a potent political force. Although seventeenth century Dutch preconceptions prevented them from perceiving the king's role as a political one, royal rhetoric did,

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<sup>1</sup> Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 65. See also Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 47.



eventually, come to work against the VOC in a profoundly political way.

This chapter explores the ambiguities involved in early contacts between the VOC and the Minangkabau interior. We learn something of the position of the king inland and about the way in which royal delegates travelled through the coastal regions. Because the Company was anxious to trade with the interior, it is about the texture of relations between the *darat* and *pesisir* that Dutch reports have most to say. The following discussion will focus on those relations by looking at the way in which the king's name was used by his subjects on the coast and also by the Dutch.

### The King in the Darat

In August 1665 Groenewegen informed the Governor-General and Council in Batavia that, at his suggestion, the Padang *panghulu* had sent some of their people to the "Mannacabers landt" in order to find out what conditions there were like. The Malay envoys returned with the news that the "Mannacabose coning" was delighted (*lust*) to hear that Padang had been released from Acehnese control.<sup>2</sup> The interior was very populous, Groenewegen reported, and "this king is lord over 1060 inhabited villages" all of which were involved in the gold trade.<sup>3</sup> The king was also said to have been ready to receive an official embassy and he told the envoys that the gold traders were afraid to use the main route to the coast.<sup>4</sup> Groenewegen was anxious to discover how advantageous a relationship with the people of Minangkabau would be for the Company and, on the basis of the envoys' report, he and the Padang

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<sup>2</sup> The way this is phrased in the report reflects the Company's consciousness of its own role. As Groenewegen puts it, Padang had freed itself with the help of the Dutch.

<sup>3</sup> Groenewegen to Batavia, 2nd of August 1665, SWK 1666 VOC 1252, f. 1013-4; see also Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 1013-4.

council decided to send a larger embassy in order to "acquaint the shy hill people with VOC's good intentions" and to keep up "present good relations with the Keizer and the Capital".<sup>5</sup>

The second deputation at the end of the same year was led by two local *panghulu* Raja di Hilir and Paduka Megat. They returned with a short letter from the king in which he expressed his satisfaction at being once again acknowledged by the Padang Malays. The ruler would seem to have received the embassy as a traditional mark of homage. Groenewegen described the letter as consisting mainly in "honour titles" (*eertitulen*) and we shall see Minangkabau royal letters were often dominated by a language of titles and high honorifics which was part of the way in which the rulers communicated with their subjects.<sup>6</sup>

It seems clear that these first Dutch approaches inland did actually reach one of the Minangkabau kings, a ruler entitled Sultan Ahmad Syah. Moreover the report made by the Padang envoys offers some important insights into the position of the ruler in the interior. According to Groenewegen's summary they had difficulty in reaching the king.

As before they had only managed to reach his majesty at the capital in the face of considerable opposition from the chiefs of Sungai Tarab and 12 Kota. These are the two most powerful groups of Minangkabau people living in the inner mountains. These try (like the four Acehnese ministers with their queen) to run things according to their own wishes and interests. They only give homage, or recognition, to the king because of his ancient origins without ever allowing him to hold the reigns of government in his hands.<sup>7</sup>

The ruler is described, therefore, as a sort of figurehead who had little effective

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., f. 1013-4 and Coolhaas, vol. III p. 763.

<sup>6</sup> Groenewegen to Batavia 18 October 1665, SWK 1666 VOC 1253, f. 1361-3, see also Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 46. According to Groenewegen's report a translation of the letter was sent to Batavia, but it has not survived among the Overgecomen Brieven of the Company.

<sup>7</sup> Groenewegen to Batavia, 18th October 1665, SWK 1666 VOC 1253, f. 1362v-3r. See also Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, pp. 46-7 for a summary of this information.

authority, who was not involved in the running of government but who did receive homage. Yet, we see from Groenewegen's report that, despite the king's supposed insignificance, the powerful chiefs of Sungai Tarab and 12 Kota tried to stop the envoys approaching him.

This apparent contradiction may be explained by the next part of Groenewegen's summary of the envoy's report. He goes on,

If one of these two peoples should come to support the king, as a means of maintaining their authority, the other group will take up arms and, after appropriate justifications they will fight each other. The state is thus held in balance without either allowing the other to accumulate disproportionate power.<sup>8</sup>

It appears, then, that the ruler did have a role in the political system inland even if it did not involve the exercise of executive power. The names Sungai Tarab and 12 Kota were probably synonymous with the *laras* Koto Piliang and Bodi Caniago. In VOC records 12 Kota is often mentioned in conjunction with Lima Kaum, the site of some of Adityawarman's inscriptions, and known in Minangkabau traditions as the focal village of the *laras* Bodi Caniago.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the Bendahara Putih of Sungai Tarab is famous in Minangkabau writings as a leading *adat* chief of the *laras* Koto Piliang.<sup>10</sup> The account of the king's position which emerges from the 1665 deputation is, therefore, very like the picture suggested by de Josselin de Jong, in which the king encompassed opposition between the two *laras* and embodied the whole community.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., ff. 1362-3, and Kroeskamp, pp. 46-7.

<sup>9</sup> For mention of this pairing in local and VOC sources, see Netscher, *Verzameling*, p. 64 and Stapel, "Een Verhandeling", p. 464. Datuk Sangguno Dirajo describes the formation of Lima Kaum/Dua Belas Kota as the result of migration from Pariangan Padang Panjang on the orders of the Bodi Caniago leader Perpatih nan Sebatang. The original settlers were five individual families who were followed by twelve additional men and twelve women. The settlements eventually grew and the federation spread into new areas. Datuk Sangguno Dirajo, *Curaian Adat Alam Minangkabau*, Bukittinggi: Pustaka Indonesia, 1987 (first published 1919), Pasal 11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., and Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 62-3.

<sup>11</sup> De Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan*, p. 108.

Dutch reports from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries often mention tension between the *laras* and hostility between different groups in the highlands. The role of the king, therefore, in "balancing" internal divisions may have been different from that of other Malay rulers encountered by the VOC, but it was not insignificant in the political life of the Minangkabau darat.

### The King in the Rantau

In 1666-7 the Padang garrison received two deputations from the royal establishment. From this developing contact we learn something of relations between the inland kingdom and the coastal regions. Apparently stimulated by the Company's interest, members of the court moved forward to assert the ruler's rights in the pesisir. In June 1666 a deputation came down to Padang via Kota Tengah with a pragmatic request for compensation for a junk which had been boarded and seized by a Company cruiser while it was sailing off Barus. The Dutch had taken it for a Makassarrese vessel, but the crew are said to have fled inland and the ruler now claimed compensation, and free passage for the king's ships.<sup>12</sup> The then Commissioner [*Commissaris*], Evert Michielsen, was anxious that the incident would damage the Company's relations with the Minangkabau king. He described the arrival of envoys from the court as the brightest thing (*de schoonste zaak*) which had happened for the Company and he was anxious to appease the ruler.<sup>13</sup>

Then, in January 1667 Abraham Verspreet, the new Company Commander and

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<sup>12</sup> SWK 1666 VOC 1258, f. 2163 and Kroeskamp, p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> SWK 1666 VOC 1258, f. 2163. The Panglima Raja, Orangkaya Kecil, asked Michielsen that nothing should be done without his knowledge, and he was given responsibility for drafting a reply to the king. Unfortunately not all the original correspondence associated with this embassy has survived.

Commissioner in west Sumatra, reported that two ambassadors from the king had arrived at Pulau Cinko.<sup>14</sup> They brought letters addressed to the coastal rulers of Padang, Kota Tengah, Salido and Inderapura, in which the king claimed recognition as their overlord, and requested that they send tribute as a mark of that recognition. The envoys showed these letters to Verspreet, but no copy appears to have been made or to have survived in the records.<sup>15</sup>

These independent moves on the part of the court to receive recognition from the *pesisir* and involve itself in the coastal world irritated Verspreet because the king's letters made no mention of the part played by the Dutch in releasing the west coast from Acehese domination. He saw the letters as a move to bring the population of the west coast back under the influence of the Minangkabau throne.<sup>16</sup> In his report on the embassy, Verspreet mentioned that, for some time, the sovereign had exerted himself to gather back Minangkabau subjects who were scattered through the archipelago.<sup>17</sup> This intention was also mentioned in a letter from the king which the two ambassadors later delivered to the Governor General in Batavia.<sup>18</sup>

We shall see later that this wish to recall far flung subjects was voiced by members of the Minangkabau royal family on other occasions. It appears to reflect the ruler's role in linking Minangkabau *rantau* communities to their homeland and the dynamics of this relationship will be discussed in more detail later. In this instance,

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<sup>14</sup> Verspreet to Batavia, 20 February 1667. SWK 1668 VOC 1264, f. 274. The envoys were Paduka Raja and Paduka Seri Maharaja Lela, who had recently been granted this title, having previously been known as Nakoda Marabat.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., and *Dagh-Register*, v. 17, p. 240. The VOC reports refer to the coastal chiefs who received the letters as "dese lantsheeren". The amount demanded was 8 bahar of pepper.

<sup>16</sup> SWK 1668 VOC 1264, f. 274.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., f. 275.

<sup>18</sup> *Dagh-Register*, v. 17, p. 298.

Verspreet was concerned because one of the royal envoys, Nakoda Marabat (or Orangkaya Paduka Maharaja Lela), was known to be a well travelled sailor who resented the ruin of the "celebrated old Malay seafaring" and blamed the Company for this.<sup>19</sup> It was possible, Verspreet speculated, that Nakoda Marabat was really acting in Acehnese interests in helping to recall the experienced Minangkabau merchants back to the west coast.<sup>20</sup> It would be better for the Company, Verspreet concluded, if the Minangkabau merchants remained scattered.

Another reason for Verspreet's distrust was Nakoda Marabat's involvement, with Raja Putih, the son of Bendahara Putih of Sungai Tarab, in imposing taxes on the goods brought to the coast by the hill merchants.<sup>21</sup> Verspreet's rejection of any real prerogative attaching to the Minangkabau royal family in this respect is conveyed nicely in his description of these events. In his letter of 13th June 1667 he wrote that how

The Manicaber has already laid claim to the coast lands and money grubbing subjects of his have come down from the capital, some appearing in this *negeri* others in that, in order to wrest tribute from the people.<sup>22</sup>

This was likened to the embassy of Raja Putih and Paduka Seri Raja, which had no other aim, according to Verspreet, than to tax and fleece the small *negeri* and the descending hill people.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "De Comp. als oorsaek der ruijne vande oude maleijtse befaemde zeevaert haten". SWK 1668 VOC 1264, f. 275r. Part of this letter is also printed in Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 159

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., f. 275, also discussed in Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 97. Verspreet's reasoning, which with hindsight seems unlikely, was that the recalled merchants would look to the ruler of Aceh as a recognised protector of Muslim trade. The presence of the scattered merchants would, he thought, facilitate the re-establishment of Acehnese authority over the west coast. Verspreet thought that Nakoda Marabat may have been behind the king's desire to recall his dispersed subjects, but such calls were also made by the royal family of Minangkabau at other times.

<sup>21</sup> SWK 1668 VOC 1264, f. 288r.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., f. 288r.

Clearly, then, the inland court was very involved with coastal affairs. Homage was expected, traders who travelled between the *darat* and *pesisir* paid taxes and coastal merchants, like the "Makassarese" crew, made appeal to the ruler and his representatives. Moreover the court was involved with Minangkabau merchants in the *rantau* regions and an envoy like Nakoda Marabat appears to have moved between both worlds with ease. It is difficult to determine how far this royal activity was the result of the VOC's arrival. Company servants naturally emphasized their own role in west Sumatra, and we know little about local society in the period when Acehese *panglima* controlled the coast. It seems, however, that the ties between court and *pesisir* were already well developed and the VOC's arrival probably provided a new stimulus to an existing relationship.

While the 1665 envoys from Padang do appear to have reached the king in Tanah Datar, it is doubtful that all the envoys and letters which were sent to the coast between 1666 and 1667 were from the individual ruler known as Sultan Ahmad Syah. In 1668, we shall see, the VOC discovered that at least some of these communications came from the Bendahara who wrote in the king's name and, apparently, without his knowledge.<sup>24</sup> The Dutch felt duped by this, but to conclude, with Kroeskamp, that this was firm evidence of the ruler's marginal position may be to miss part of the point of the king's position in Minangkabau. In using the king's name, whether or not this was authorized and accepted behaviour, the Bendahara was nevertheless working within a framework which was structured in terms of kingship. If the king himself was not involved, his name still seems to have been part of the way in which coastal-hinterland relations were conceived and articulated. This point also applies to Dutch

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<sup>24</sup> This discovery was made in 1668 when an embassy from Padang travelled inland to the court and the envoys reported the details of their conversation with the king. It emerged that the ruler was ignorant of some of the communications which had been sent in his name. This matter is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five below. See also Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, pp. 95-6.

relations with the interior.

### Ambiguous Interaction

The unseen quality of the king inland as far as the Dutch, and indeed many *pesisir* Malays, were concerned may have contributed to the mystery and prestige of the ruler in dealings between the interior and the coast. The VOC never knew when to expect a deputation from the interior. When an embassy arrived, however, Company servants rarely lost an opportunity to use the influence of the ruler to affect conditions on the coast and to promote the gold trade. This led the VOC into a complex relationship with the court which probably affected the position of the royal family and certainly influenced the character of Dutch judgments about the kingship.

Despite the contractual terminology of the Painan Treaty the VOC essentially regarded the west coast of Sumatra as an outright conquest.<sup>25</sup> What was needed, from the Company's perspective, was a means of consolidating this control and ensuring a regular flow of gold to the coast. Verspreet also linked what he saw as Muslim religious opposition to the Dutch with local support for Aceh and he appears to have identified this motive for resistance as a significant threat to the Company's position on the west coast.<sup>26</sup> In his letter of 20th February, he referred to the desirability of finding "a way to soften the resentment of Muslims when they were subservient to the Hollander".<sup>27</sup> As a means of counteracting this perceived threat and containing the ruler's aspirations to tax the coastal people Verspreet put forward

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<sup>25</sup> SWK 1668 VOC 1264, f. 282v. See also Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 110.

<sup>26</sup> In 1666 Michielsen noted an increasing inclination among the west coast population to subject themselves to Aceh once more. He reported that 3,000 Acehnese were admitted to Kota Tengah. SWK 1666 VOC 1258, f. 2167 and Kroeskamp, p. 78.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 282 v. and Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 97. VOC 1264, f. 288v.



the idea which was to structure VOC relations with the interior until the end of the century.

This was the notion of recognising the inland king as sovereign over the west coast in exchange for his renunciation of any claims he might cherish to tax the people or to act independently of the Dutch. As Verspreet put it to his superiors,

we have found it expedient, depending upon your excellencies approval, to hang the title of king (*coninck*) over this western coast upon the "Mananghcabousen vorst", which will fulfil various profitable aims for us.<sup>28</sup>

Recognition of the king was a means of achieving his compliance with the Company's presence and aims on the west coast. It would be unwise, Verspreet suggested, to oppose the king and the Bendahara and better to win them over.<sup>29</sup> Implicit in Verspreet's plan was the idea of placing a Muslim overlord between the Company and the people of the west coast, and he remarked on the need for a "very penetrative authority" over the coastal people.<sup>30</sup>

There is, of course, an irony involved in a Dutch grant of kingship to an existing, indigenous, king and the uncertainty which surrounds the actual role of that king on the west coast before the Dutch arrived makes this an even more ambiguous development. The probability that it was not even the king himself with whom the Company was dealing at the time adds a further level of complexity.

Verspreet's specific proposal was that the Company should recognise the ruler as king, but that in exchange he should not tax the people or levy tribute from them. He must also accept and give his imprimatur to all contracts which the Company

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<sup>28</sup> SWK 1667 VOC 1264, f. 274r.

<sup>29</sup> SWK 1668 VOC 1264, f. 288r.

<sup>30</sup> In his letter of the 13th of June 1667 Verspreet referred to renewed opposition in certain localities, the inhabitants of which were forcing the Company to "dance to their pipes" unless they were given gifts and were otherwise appeased. These remarks are made in the context of his intention to "hang" the title of king on the Minangkabau ruler. VOC 1264, f. 288r-v. and Kroeskamp, p. 95.

concluded on the west coast. Finally the Dutch *opperhoofd* should act as *stadhouder* or viceroy of the king in the coastal lands.<sup>31</sup> Verspreet's correspondence with the court over this matter has not survived<sup>32</sup>, but according to his own account Verspreet himself (and later J.J. Pits<sup>33</sup>) was recognised as the king's *stadhouder* and was given authority to direct affairs on the west coast in "the king's interests", as Verspreet puts it. The king's seal appears to have been sent to Verspreet with permission to use his name.<sup>34</sup>

We do not know exactly how Verspreet and his superiors conceived of the term *stadhouder*, but the title was probably an equivocal one in the mid-seventeenth century, especially where Dutchmen used it to refer to themselves. The term is translated in modern Dutch-English dictionaries as "viceregent", "viceroy" and "governor or proconsul" in the sense of a holder of executive powers who represents a higher authority.<sup>35</sup> In the Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, the meaning and role of the position underwent some transition as the question of a higher authority became increasingly complex. In the early sixteenth century the office of *stadhouder* was that of governor of a principality and was held as

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<sup>31</sup> It was also suggested that Raja Putih should be involved in the government.

<sup>32</sup> Two unnamed Malay envoys were sent to the king with a letter which has not survived, VOC 1264, f. 287v. From Verspreet's description of his letter, it seems that he was not explicit about his proposition, but rather wrote as though he recognised the king on whose behalf the Company had recovered the west coast.

<sup>33</sup> Jacob Joritsen Pits was appointed to the position of *Opperhoofd* over Sumatra's Westkust in 1666, at the same time as Verspreet was given the position of military commander. Pits did not take up his appointment, however, until February 1667. Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 80 and p.98.

<sup>34</sup> SWK 1668 VOC 1264 288r.

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, W. Martin and G.A.J. Tops *Van Dale Groot Woordenboek Nederlands-Engels*, Utrecht/Antwerpen: Van Dale Lexicografie, 1986 and J. Gerritsen et.al. *Engels Woordenboek. Achttiende Druk*, Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1984.

a representative of the Emperor in Spain.<sup>36</sup> During the conflict from which the Republic emerged, however, the position evolved into something more, without displacing the earlier usage. In times of war and national stress the House of Orange came to represent an "incarnation of national will" for the Republic.<sup>37</sup> Of the seven United Provinces, at the end of the century, five usually voted for a prince of Orange as their *Stadhouder*.<sup>38</sup>

The original intention of the revolt was not republican and initially the States cast about for a substitute sovereign.<sup>39</sup> When none materialised the States General moved gradually to a position in which sovereignty (implying the source of authority) came to be vested in themselves. This was not a straightforward matter, however, and in the absence of a monarch the House of Orange and the position of *stadhouder* came to exert great influence. During the mid-seventeenth century the position of *stadhouder vis a vis* that of the States General was still in the process of evolution.<sup>40</sup> There was considerable debate during this period over the question of where

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<sup>36</sup> Previously from the Dukes of Burgundy. Herbert H. Rowan, *The Princes of Orange. The Stadholders in the Dutch Republic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988 p. 2. This recent study traces the evolution of the position of *stadhouder* in the Dutch Republic.

<sup>37</sup> Schama, *Embarrassment of Riches*, p. 62.

<sup>38</sup> Even as "governors" the provincial *stadhouders* held considerable power and, according to one scholar, "exercised virtually all the rights of the ruling prince within their provinces." Ibid., pp. 3-4 and p. 62.

<sup>39</sup> Rowan, *The Princes of Orange*, p. 23 and p. 26. The revolt began as a protest against absolutist royal policies and developed into a rejection of royal sovereignty itself. Schama, *Embarrassment of Riches*, p. 15. See also Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, London: Peregrine, 1988, pages 201, 180 and 241-3.

<sup>40</sup> On the attitudes of *stadhouders* Maurice and Frederick-Henry see, Rowan, *The Princes of Orange*, p. 55 and 66. The question of sovereignty was not explicitly determined and it remained unclear until it was put to the test by William II in 1650, Rowan, *The Princes of Orange*, pages, 30, 77 and 87.

sovereignty was vested and whether the *stadhoudership* was itself a kingly role.<sup>41</sup> It is by no means clear, therefore, that Dutchmen in the 1660's would have regarded the position of *stadhouder* as clearly representing a higher power.

A survey of the published letters of the VOC in the seventeenth century suggests that west Sumatra was the only region where VOC representatives used this term to designate their own role. Interestingly, *stadhouder* seems to have been used in the letters only in certain limited geographical contexts, and, except for west Sumatra, its use refers to an already established and recognised local role or position of delegated authority.<sup>42</sup> One school of thought depicts the seventeenth century role of the VOC in the East Indies as that of a large merchant rather than as a colonial power.<sup>43</sup> In West Sumatra, however, the Dutch found it increasingly necessary to govern in order to trade. In this context we may read Verspreet's assumption of the role and title of *stadhouder* as a complex development. It indicates, for instance, an active involvement in the local political structure and here it may be significant that a *stadhouder* was more than a royal delegate in the United Provinces during the seventeenth century. The position had become powerful in itself.

The Dutch concept of *stadhoudership* had a parallel, though not an exact

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<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, Rowan, *The Princes of Orange*, p. 93. On the ambiguity of the Stadhouder's position see J.H. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilization in the Seventeenth Century and other Essays*, London: Fontana and Collins, 1968, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup> A brief survey of the published letters of the VOC reveals that the term *stadhouder* appears to have been used in four contexts. In Southeast Asia it appears in the published letters in references to the representatives of the ruler of Ternate on Ceram and in the Minangkabau context already mentioned, as well as in occasional other references to Sumatran rulers. Outside Southeast Asia *Stadhouders* are also mentioned in reference to Japan and in India where the records frequently use the word as an equivalent of *naib* or *nayab* meaning deputy, and as an alternative to the Dutch *hertog* or "duke". A brief survey of the letters suggests that by the eighteenth century the local term *wakil* was more commonly used in the context of the Malay archipelago, with *stadhouder* appearing less often.

<sup>43</sup> J. C. van Leur, "On Early Asian Trade" in *Indonesian Trade and Society*, (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1967). For a discussion of van Leur's thesis and its reception see J.D. Legge, *Indonesia*, (Sydney, Prentice-Hall: 1977, 1980), pp. 72-4 and "The Writing of Southeast Asian History" in N. Tarling (ed.), *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* (1992), Ch. I.

equivalent, in Minangkabau thought. In Dutch-Indonesian dictionaries *stadhouder* is translated as *wakil raja* (or "deputy raja").<sup>44</sup> This was the term used in Minangkabau to grant authority to the VOC to act on the king's behalf. Verspreet records that he was given the title *Menteri Raja* and *wakil mutlak* ("plenipotentiary" or "attorney")<sup>45</sup>. The delegation of royal powers was not unusual in Malay polities.<sup>46</sup> The position of Bendahara, for instance offered considerable scope for the exercise of executive power and Europeans often noticed that the Malay ruler tended not to be involved in the day to day running of government.<sup>47</sup> But however powerful Malay officials might become, they held office and rank within the terms of the royal system, the *kerajaan*.<sup>48</sup> The titles issued to delegates often reflected the intimate link between the king and his *wakil* (deputy) or *ganti* (representative or substitute). On the west coast J.J. Pits was given the dignity of Cahaya Raja or "lustre of the ruler", which suggests the way in

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<sup>44</sup> L. Th. Mayer, *Practisch Maleischen-Hollandsch en Hollandsch-Maleisch Handwoordenboek*, s'Gravenhage: G.C.T. van Dorp & Co, 1906 and H.C. Klinkert, *Nieuw Nederlandsch-Maleisch Woordenboek* 3rd Edit. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1926.

<sup>45</sup> "Mantrij Radja" and "Wakil Mutala". VOC 1264, f. 282v. R.J. Wilkinson, *Malay-English Dictionary*, sv. *mutlak*. *Wakil* indicates "agent, attorney or deputy", while *mutlak* is "unconditional; absolute." Verspreet was also given the title *Yang Pahlawan Gagah*, which conveys the notion of vigorous warrior and perhaps champion of the king. "*Jangh Falouangh Gagga*", VOC 1264 f. 282v. Titles implying prowess in war may have been seen by Malay kings to be particularly appropriate to the Dutch; in 1642 a King of Perak gave a Dutch merchant there the title "*Sierij Radja Jouwan Pulawan*", or "*Seri Raja Johan Pahlawan*" which Wilkinson translates as "foremost champion of the world". *Dagh-Register*, vol. 6 (1642) p. 167. This reference is cited by B.W. Andaya, "Melaka under the Dutch, 1641-1795", in Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley (eds.) *Melaka*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1983 p.197 n.5.

<sup>46</sup> As Wilkinson notes "*Wakil* is met with as a title of high rank; in Perak the *Raja Muda* and *Raja Bandahara* are *wakil al-sultan*; in Selangor the "Viceroy" *Tengku Dzia-udin*, was the Sultan's *wakil mutlak*; and the Pulau Tujoh were governed by a *wakil* of the Sultan of Riau" The term also appears in Minangkabau dictionaries, Van der Toorn gives *wakil* as "*gemachtigde, agent, zaakwaarnemer*". J.L. van der Toorn, *Minangkabausche-Maleisch-Nederlandsch Woordenboek*, 's Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1881 p. 383.

<sup>47</sup> See Milner, *Kerajaan*, passim.

<sup>48</sup> This point is illustrated by the problems of credibility experienced by the Bendahara dynasty in Melaka in the eighteenth century.

which Pits' position was seen as a reflection and emanation of the ruler's own glow.<sup>49</sup> In the archipelago in the seventeenth century the idiom of kingship had not been rent apart as in the Netherlands and men still conducted public life in terms of a sovereign royal authority.

Moreover the fluid character of Minangkabau royal authority, and the wide dispersal of Minangkabau settlements throughout Sumatra and beyond, seems to have lent itself to the delegation of royal powers. As we saw in Chapter Two, rulers with links to the Minangkabau court were spread through Sumatra from Siak to Inderapura. These *rantau* courts often advertised their connections with the Minangkabau interior. In subsequent chapters we shall see that representatives of the Minangkabau kings located in the frontier regions often possessed seals and credentials from the court and held their positions in the name of the ruler of Minangkabau.<sup>50</sup>

The essential structure of the relationship between the Company and the royal family which Verspreet had initiated was not, therefore, completely strange in either culture. Delegation of royal powers had a place in both Dutch and Minangkabau political thinking. Beyond this formal parallel, however, there was room for considerable differences in orientation. Like the question of contract discussed in Chapter Three, Dutch and Minangkabau perceptions of their mutual relations differed. Indeed both sides were to reinterpret the Stadhouder arrangement over time and to approach it from the perspective of their own particular interests and cultural backgrounds.

It is not surprising that the practice of delegation, and the use of various means

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<sup>49</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272 f. 1039r. See Chapter Five.

<sup>50</sup> A twentieth century Dutch report refers to representatives of the Minangkabau ruler in the Kuantan region of east Sumatra as "*stedeholders*", "De Hoofden in de Kwantan (1918)" in *Adatrechtbundels*, 27 (1928), p. 392.

such as letters, seals and titles through which this could be expressed and formalized, should lead to a situation in which the Minangkabau royal name might be used by others for their own ends. In the late 1660s both locals and foreigners attempted to employ Minangkabau royal prestige for their own commercial and political purposes. The interesting thing here is that the royal name appears to have had a considerable impact on the west coast even though the king himself was not involved.

### Using the Royal Name

Use of the king's name had an immediate effect in facilitating the flow of trade.

Verspreet reported that

We have been consolidated in that quality all around, thus we have begun so completely to establish ourselves with the king's seal and under his name that all obstacles to reaching our goal have vanished. We have heard of no more difficulties, all the pathways have been opened and the *barong baringh* overflow with hill folk. In short we have taken 400 thail of pure gold from their hands  
.....<sup>51</sup>

Thus a mere name, or "quality", in Verspreet's view, had an immediate practical impact. While the Bendahara Putih may have been influential in effecting this movement of trade, that, too, was accomplished in the royal name.<sup>52</sup>

Verspreet was simultaneously cynical about this new relationship between the Company and the Minangkabau court and proud of its effectiveness. He referred to the use of the king's name as ruler over the coast lands as a disguise (*bemantelen*), and the titles invested in himself and Pits as being merely for form's sake (*quansuijs*). The role

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<sup>51</sup> VOC 1264 f. 288r. *Barong baringh* appears to be a version of *warung-warung* for market stalls, the same term is also mentioned in VOC records discussed in Drakard, *Malay Frontier*, p. 27.

<sup>52</sup> We shall see, in later chapters, that the ruler was quite often able to ensure the free-flow of goods from the mountains to the coast and that this occurred in situations where the Bendahara does not seem to have been involved.

of the *raad* or council of local *panghulu* was also described as *quansuijs*.<sup>53</sup> Verspreet was a man of his time. His statements manifest a seventeenth century Dutch impatience with pomp and titles coupled with scepticism about anything which smacked of rhetoric rather than of a reassuring reality.<sup>54</sup> The term *kwansuis*, "for form's sake" or "ostensibly", was used repeatedly by seventeenth century VOC servants to refer to local titles and political claims.<sup>55</sup> Terminology of this sort acted as a device for distancing a level of political activity which the Dutch did not understand and could not control.

At the same time, like many Dutchmen who were to follow him in west Sumatra, Verspreet articulated the contradiction which was inherent in the Company's preparedness to use these *kwansuis* titles and to acknowledge their effectiveness while at the same time dismissing them. As Verspreet wrote,

although these appear to be petty matters, they have resulted in the Company being solemnly recognized as absolute lord over the west coast territories not only in name, but also in power (*macht*).<sup>56</sup>

In this statement Verspreet clearly enunciates a distinction between formal authority and actual power. He automatically assumes that the name itself could hardly be powerful and that real authority must rest behind the appearance. For modern European readers this may seem a natural assumption, but it will be part of the argument in later chapters that this was not necessarily the way in which authority was conceived in seventeenth century Sumatra.

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<sup>53</sup> SWK 1668 VOC 1264, f. 282v.

<sup>54</sup> Refer, for example, to J.H. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilization in the Seventeenth Century and other Essays*, London:, Fontana and Collins, 1968., pp. 114-5.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, VOC 1264, f. 290 v.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.



## Manipulators and Falsifiers

Significantly Verspreet was not the only one making use of the Minangkabau royal name at this juncture. Several local actors were also working within the idiom of Minangkabau kingship. In June 1667 Verspreet travelled to Batavia in company with two Minangkabau envoys and who carried a letter from the king and others from the coastal regions.<sup>57</sup> These envoys returned to Sumatra in August carrying with them letters and gifts from the Governor General to their respective masters. It appears that the gifts and letters intended for the king did not reach him, and they appear to have been delivered to Bendahara Putih.<sup>58</sup>

The Minangkabau letter which was sent to Batavia at this time appears in the Batavia *Dagh-Register*. It shares many characteristics with other Minangkabau royal letters which will be considered in detail later in this study. It opens with the words,

Written with affection and from a pure and upright heart, from Paduka Seri Sultan Ahmad Syah, who is a true descendant of King Iskandar Zulkarnain who, under the [as a] shadow of God above is made great in this world. God gave to Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain three crowns and a staff which he divided and handed over to his three sons the Emperor of Turkey, the King of China and the King of Minangkabau.<sup>59</sup>

The letter also lists items and geographical features which are said to be in the possession of the Minangkabau king, including one thousand gold mines. The rhythmic and repetitive style of this letter, which is evident even in translation, is characteristic of Minangkabau royal writing, as is the elaboration of the ruler's attributes and

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<sup>57</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 17 (1666-7), pp. 296-302. The Minangkabau envoys were named as Orangkaya Paduka Seri Maharaja Lela and Orangkaya Paduka Raja. Letters from the *panghulu* of Salido, Padang and Bayang were delivered each of which mentioned the grant of titles and the status of deputy and seal-bearer made to Verspreet by the ruler of Minangkabau.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, and Chapter Five below. The royal ambassadors carried one *patola* (Indian cloth), one *armosyntje* (a thin piece of silk), a short sword and ten flasks of rose water.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 297-8.

possessions. These poetic features contrast with the more practical style of the letters sent by west coast *panghulu* such as Orangkaya Kecil who were allied with the Dutch.

Despite its regal qualities, however, the Minangkabau letter is directed at more practical issues than is usually the case with such royal missives from Minangkabau and this point will become clearer when we consider later letters from the court. As we shall see, circumstantial evidence suggests that the letter was really sent from the Bendahara Putih at Sungai Tarab in the name of the king. It is, therefore, noteworthy that a later report from Pits suggests that the letter was tampered with before it reached Batavia.

When Verspreet first received the king's letter he sent it to the Sultan of Inderapura for advice concerning its contents. The Sultan is said to have kept the letter for two months and to have altered it in the meantime, adding his own name to the text. When the letter was read it was heard, said Pits, that the name of Bendahara Putih, "regent over the whole Kingdom of Minangkabau", had been replaced by that of the Sultan of Inderapura.<sup>60</sup> The closing paragraph of the letter does, indeed, ask for the Governor General's protection for the king's "son" and "grandsons" - the Sultan of Inderapura and his relations.<sup>61</sup> In this incident, then, we find another example of the Minangkabau royal name being used by those who wished to advance their own positions on the west coast.

Whether or not this part of the letter originally referred to Bendahara Putih, the mere fact that a substitution was suggested by seventeenth century Sumatrans offers an important insight into the way in which royal letters from the Minangkabau

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<sup>60</sup> Pits to Batavia 16th September 1667, VOC 1265 SWK 1668, f. 849r.

<sup>61</sup> Dagh-Register, vol. 17 p. 297. In translation the text of this part of the letter reads as follows: "Moreover, after this, I place under the protection of Governor General, Joan Maetsuyker, my sons and grandsons Sultan Muhammad Syah, Raja Malasyah and Raja Sulaiman in Inderapura against all those who would do them harm, or who have harmed them, in that case I ask for the assistance of the Governor General."

court were used and regarded in Sumatra. "Forgeries" and substitutions were common and, as we proceed, will be fruitful to consider what this may tell us about the nature of delegation and representation in local society. There appears to have been a flexibility about the way in which the Minangkabau royal name was used which was unusual in Malay kingdoms and even more unusual in contemporary Europe.<sup>62</sup>

Verspreet was optimistic that Minangkabau royal prestige in west Sumatra could be manipulated to strengthen the VOC's position there and Pits too, when he arrived in west Sumatra, set about using the royal name whenever feasible. He too signed letters in the name of the king and made use of the royal seal.<sup>63</sup> Contracts were also entered into in the king's name. In 1668, when Barus was brought into the west coast alliance, the contract signed with the VOC by the Barus *regenten* required them to renounce the overlordship of Aceh and to live henceforth under their "lawful ruler (*wettigen beheerscher*) the Minangkabau King" and under the protection of this king's authorised *stadhouder* Jacob Pits. They were exhorted to recognise the said "Majesty of Minangkabau" as their sovereign king (*souvereynen coninck*) and chief and to acknowledge the Company as their "liberators, protectors and commanders" (*verlossers, beschermers ende gebieders*) who had been authorised by their king.<sup>64</sup> Indeed the Company moved, in this period, to promote actively the name of the Minangkabau ruler. He was referred to as an Emperor or *Keizer* and Company dealings with the

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<sup>62</sup> The letter cited above was probably a double forgery in Dutch eyes since it is unlikely to have emanated from "the" Minangkabau king.

<sup>63</sup> Pits came to west Sumatra with more experience of Malay custom and language than some other VOC servants, and it was under his period of command that the relationship between the VOC on the coast and the Minangkabau court inland was consolidated.

<sup>64</sup> SWK 1669 VOC 1268, ff. 841-844. The contract is printed in *Corpus Diplomaticum*, pp.383-389. The debate within Barus over whether to ally with the VOC or to retain their Acehnese affiliation, at least in so far as it is recorded in VOC records, is discussed in Drakard, *A Malay Frontier*, p. 31-2. Minangkabau royal prestige in Barus is mentioned in the same work, pp. 59-60 and p. 120.

west coast population were all conducted in his name.

This seems to have been in part a cynical exercise and in part a reflection of the VOC hope that the Minangkabau ruler would prove to be an effective source of local authority for them. Dutch servants of the Company were still in the process of finding out about west Sumatran conditions in these years and their judgments may have been shaped as much by preconceived notions as by their direct experience in Sumatra. There were always practical reasons why a monopolistic capital-intensive enterprise wanted to deal with a single authority and, if possible, a single seller.<sup>65</sup> The search for a king with whom to deal is also likely to have been shaped as much by seventeenth century European assumptions about oriental governments as by a simple reflection of domestic Dutch political thinking. The Dutch themselves were predisposed to be impatient with kingship. The years of war against the Spanish empire forged the independent spirit of the nation and helped to foster a distaste for royal authority.<sup>66</sup>

On the other hand there is evidence to suggest that, despite Verspreet's desire to circumscribe the exercise of royal prerogatives, and his cynical attitude towards the Company's adoption of the Minangkabau royal name, VOC officials nevertheless appear to have visualised a central royal authority in the years 1667 and 1668.

There was, for instance a fear that opposition to the VOC might focus around the king if royal aspirations were not to some extent accommodated. The "effectiveness" of royal authority had also been demonstrated to the Dutch when the hill paths were opened and the gold trade began to flow freely once more after Verspreet's recognition of the "king". Indeed in subsequent years VOC servants were

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<sup>65</sup> A. Reid, "Trade and State Power in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Southeast Asia", *Proceedings of the Seventh IAHA Conference, Bangkok, August 1977*, Bangkok: International Association of Historians of Southeast Asia, 1979, pp. 403-4.

<sup>66</sup> In 1706 Roman de Hooghe wrote of the "strenuous spirit of opposition to a sovereign concentrated in one head". Cited by Simon Schama in *The Embarrassment of Riches*, p. 53.

often to find that a large gift to the ruler was sufficient to set stagnant trade moving and in such cases members of the royal establishment may have intervened in disputes between rival hill groups. Verspreet recorded in 1667 that, whilst the west coast *regenten* were supported in practical terms by their families (*geslachten*), by which he probably meant their *suku*, they held their commissions in theory from the Minangkabau king.<sup>67</sup> Further evidence of claims to royal recognition in the coastal areas could be found in the collection of tribute or "*upatti*" from the chiefs which was a particular concern for VOC officials. Such taxes were considered to be an unwarranted burden upon the people and one which would make the Company unpopular.

More subtle still than the issue of how the VOC actually perceived Minangkabau royal authority in this period, is the question of how these Dutch manipulations affected their role. Although the sources upon which this type of information is based are meagre, and there are few general descriptions of the population in the records from this period, a distinction should be made in these matters between different groups of the population and in particular between those who had experienced greater and less exposure to external commercial contacts. The letters sent to Batavia from west coast chiefs who had allied themselves with the Company contrast with those from the court inland. The language used by Orangkaya Kecil and other allied chiefs has more in common with the practical and mercantile orientation of the Company than with the elevated language of the court. These coastal brokers, most of whom were Dutch appointees, sent letters which, albeit in translation, are written in a style which suggests that they had absorbed to some extent the Company ethos and knew, at least, how to talk to the Dutchmen in terms which were familiar to the European mind. This worldly style is not necessarily attributable merely to Dutch commercial contacts and may have derived also from long experience

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<sup>67</sup> SWK 1668 VOC 1264, f. 290v.

of adaptation to varying political and commercial circumstances ranging from the Acehese monopoly to contacts with Portuguese, English and Indian merchants.

Letters sent to Batavia from the *panghulu* of Padang, Salido, and other west coast localities between 1667-8 refer to Verspreet and Pits as the deputies or appointees (*gemachtigen*) of the Minangkabau ruler and use their Malay titles from the king.<sup>68</sup> This emphasis upon the Company's Minangkabau connection, and Pits' assumed role as Minangkabau representative, could perhaps be taken as an indication that the title was a meaningful one as far as the west coast *panghulu* were concerned. The possibility also exists, however, that in reiterating Pits's *stadhouder* title and accentuating the role of the Minangkabau king the local chiefs were paying lip service to the VOC's invented relationship with the ruler and were seeking to ingratiate themselves with the Governor General and council in Batavia. In assessing the evidence for local receptivity to Minangkabau royal influence we should not ignore the possibility that VOC intervention helped to promote Minangkabau royal authority as an issue among at least some sections of the population of west Sumatra during this period. There is, on the other hand, evidence that for local chiefs too the lustre of royal prestige was a potent means of obtaining popular support.

In the latter part of 1667 Pits reported a series of disturbances in the southern region of 10 Bandar in which Raja Putih, the son of Bendahara Putih, appears to have played a central role.<sup>69</sup> Raja Putih, it will be remembered, had also been involved, earlier in 1667, in an embassy from the interior which had attempted to raise tribute in this region. Initially Verspreet had proposed making Raja Putih co-regent or

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<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, the letters translated into Dutch in the *Dagh-Register*, vol 17, pp. 299-302 and vol. 18, pp. 277-280.

<sup>69</sup> Pits' report is contained in a letter he wrote to Batavia on the 16th September 1667, SWK 1668 VOC 1264, ff. 840r-842v, this has been summarised by Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, pp. 125-7, see also Chapter Five below.

*stadhouder* over the west coast, a strategy which had been intended to accommodate Raja Putih and to make the Company's role more palatable.<sup>70</sup> Once the Dutch *stadhoudership* was established, however, Raja Putih's position was not taken seriously by the Dutch. Raja Putih appears to have been a mobile and high status figure on the west coast. This is a role which is often depicted in local literature and it seems to have been a conventional one in the Minangkabau *rantau* regions. For the Dutch the appearance of distinguished "princes" from the interior was to be a disruptive force throughout their tenure on the west coast.

On this occasion we encounter a further instance in which princely status was used to influence events on the west coast. According to Pits' analysis, Raja Putih "came under the influence" of Lela Garam from 10 Bandar. This "manipulator", "falsifier" and "disturber of the peace" (*oorblaser, falsaris and turbateur der gemeene ruste*<sup>71</sup>) is presented as using Raja Putih's status for his own ends and attempting to pass himself off as the delegate of the four *suku* in Batang Kapas.<sup>72</sup> When this strategy failed Lela Garam is said to have encouraged Raja Putih to incite the population of 10 Bandar against the Dutch, in alliance with a large group of exiles from Pauh.<sup>73</sup>

Manifestations of opposition towards the VOC are often defined in these terms in the records and a later chapter will pay more detailed attention to notions such as "incitement" and the implied role of *agents provocateurs*. Suffice it to note here that Raja Putih possessed considerable status. Just as the Bendahara Putih was described as a *vorst*, Raja Putih is referred to as "*desen jongen Manecabousen vorst*". His

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<sup>70</sup> See note 31 above.

<sup>71</sup> SWK 1668 VOC 1264, f. 840v-841r.

<sup>72</sup> SWK 1668 VOC 1264, f. 840r.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 841r.

supporters recognized him as Panglima Raja in the 10 Bandar and he is said to have justified this promotion by saying that he had been sent by his father, and that he had been placed in this new authority in order to win greater respect and lustre (*ontsag* and *luijster*). To his supporters he claimed that he had dominion over the Dutch who would "dance to his tune" and whom he would drive from the west coast.<sup>74</sup> A factor which may have enhanced Raja Putih's influence in these coastal areas, and may even to some extent account for his prestige was his possession, at least in 1667, of a royal seal from Minangkabau.<sup>75</sup> As an envoy of the court and a bearer of the royal seal Raja Putih's presence appears to have had an almost talismanic function.

On a number of significant occasions between 1665 and 1667, therefore, political actors in west Sumatra are described as using Minangkabau royal status as a vehicle for advancing their own interests and prestige. The Bendahara Putih pretended to be the King and wrote letters to the Dutch in the King's name. The Dutch themselves "borrowed" the King's name from Bendahara Putih and instituted the *Stadhouder* arrangement in which they were authorized to use the royal name and royal seal in their dealings with the local population. The Sultan of Inderapura inserted his own name in the putative royal letter sent to Batavia by Raja Putih, thereby identifying himself as a descendant of the King and placing himself under the umbrella of royal status. And finally Raja Putih was adopted by Lela Garam as a vehicle for raising anti-Dutch support in the 10 Bandar and Raja Putih, himself, used his princely status and his royal seal to win "respect and lustre" among the coastal population. While Sultan Ahmad Syah was directly involved in very little of this action, his royal name was engaged in each of these attempts to direct events on the west coast. Minangkabau kings, it emerges, did not need to *act* to be influential.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., f. 294r.



From this examination of early Dutch communications with the court it has been possible to extract some insights into the nature of the ruler's position. Inland we find, not unexpectedly, that the ruler was little concerned with the running of *nagari* affairs. Yet he kept the kingdom in equilibrium by "balancing" tension between the two major groups in the *darat*. Relations between the court and the coast had a more energetic character and this may have been due partly to the ruler's involvement in the gold trade, about which these sources say little. Ties between the court and the western *peisir* were clearly well developed and both the ruler and his substitutes responded keenly to the VOC's first overtures. The ruler himself appears not to have travelled to the coastal regions, rather the king communicated with the *rantau* through regal letters and envoys.

Delegation, we find, was a particularly important feature of the king's relations with the coast. Yet delegation, in this context, appears to have been understood rather loosely to European eyes and the king's name was employed in situations where the ruler himself was not involved. The name, nevertheless, had an impact and claims to authority in west coast society were couched in the language of kingship. In this sense royal authority cannot be said to have been irrelevant to the political life of west Sumatra. Although VOC servants distinguished between "real" power and the "*kwansuis*" titles they obtained from the king, the royal name, they admitted, seemed to have a "real" effect on people and events in west Sumatra. A discrepancy appears, therefore, between the way in which VOC officials characterised royal status in Sumatra and the impact they describe. To begin to determine why it was that Dutch East India Company servants responded so uncertainly to the nature of Minangkabau kingship we must probe this developing relationship further.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### UNDER THE CLOUDS OF MINANGKABAU

If Minangkabau kingship has acquired an aura of mystery and proves to be a difficult subject for historical inquiry it is not without good reason. The topic presents several complex problems ranging from the number of rulers who held office in the interior and the location of their courts, to the principle of succession followed by the dynasty. These questions are important for an understanding of the Minangkabau kingdom and they bear on aspects of the ruler's role which will be discussed in later chapters.

Dutch sources from the seventeenth century can help us to address these questions, but patience is required to mine information from archives which were assembled with other purposes in mind. In the previous chapter we found that by tracing a developing Dutch relationship with the Minangkabau court we might uncover information about the role of the ruler inland and about his links with the western *peisisir*. In the present chapter, the intention is to use the same approach to probe the first of these questions - the ruler's position inland. Chapter Six, in turn, will look more carefully at relations between the court and the coast.

It so happens that the chronological record of Dutch contact with the Minangkabau *darat* offers a rare opportunity to investigate the situation of Sultan Ahmad Syah in Tanah Datar. In September 1668 the Dutch establishment at Padang came into direct contact with this king by means of a full embassy inland undertaken by some of the most trusted local allies of the Dutch. The report of the embassy has never been analysed in a published account of Minangkabau history which is surprising since it offers a first detailed insight into conditions in the *darat* and to the

nature of the court and its relations with other parts of the interior. Several years later, in 1684, another expedition travelled inland at the behest of the VOC, this time approaching the Minangkabau royal establishment via the east coast of Sumatra. A report on the journey was tendered to the VOC Governor of Melaka. Together these two travel accounts are unique sources for reassessing some of the historical problems surrounding the Minangkabau kingdom.

This chapter attempts such a reassessment. First the 1668 embassy is described and discussed. We then turn to an analysis of royal succession in Minangkabau and the division of kingship between different courts in the interior. Following that the 1684 embassy is considered for what it can reveal about changes within the Minangkabau *darat* in the second half of the seventeenth century. The discussion paves the way for later chapters which will look more closely at the role of Minangkabau kings in the coastal regions of Sumatra.

### **A Meeting: The Court Described**

The 1668 embassy inland was initiated at the suggestion of the *panghulu* of Kota Tengah who reported that long standing tension between the inland regions of Duabelas Kota and Sungai Tarab had escalated into an open war. The inhabitants of Duabelas Kota were said to have resented the authority assumed by the Bendahara Putih of Sungai Tarab.<sup>1</sup> This tension between members of each of the two Minangkabau *laras* was foreshadowed for the Dutch in the 1665 report of the envoys Raja di Hilir and Paduka Megat in which these two groups were said to have jockeyed with each other for position and, apparently, for access or proximity to royal authority,

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<sup>1</sup> Pits to Batavia 27 December 1668 SWK 1670 VOC 1272, ff. 1012r-v..

thus maintaining an uneasy balance of power within the kingdom.<sup>2</sup> The Kota Tengah *panghulu* asserted that unless an embassy was sent inland with gifts then the passage of goods to the coast would slow to a standstill.

It was thus agreed in 1668 to send an embassy directly to the King with a large gift of 1,700-1,800 guilders and with a letter asking him to intercede in the dispute which was holding up the gold trade. Gifts and letters were also to be conveyed to each of the four principal regions of the kingdom which are identified as Batipu, Duabelas Kota, Sungai Tarab and Pariangan with the request that the fighting should cease and that the hill merchants be encouraged to bring their goods to the coast again. Strangely no Dutchman took part in the mission and Pits' report makes no mention of that possibility having been discussed. Those chosen to travel inland were the experienced envoy and prominent Padang *panghulu*, Raja di Hilir, the Company's Secretary Katib Muda and one of the Kota Tengah *panghulu* named Nakhoda Putih who was accompanied by a "stately retinue" composed of the sons of Kota Tengah *panghulu*.<sup>3</sup>

The report of this embassy takes the form of a travel diary which reflects the perspective of Katib Muda and Raja di Hilir in so far as it is written in the first person plural and follows their experience of the journey, recounting that of their companions

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<sup>2</sup> Groenewegen to Batavia, 18th October 1665, VOC 1253 f. 1362v-3r. The relevant passage is quoted in translation on page 78 above.

<sup>3</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, ff. 1013r-v. The term Nakhoda, which usually implies a ship's captain, was used as a chiefly title in west Sumatra. See, for instance, *Corpus Diplomaticum*, vol. III, p. 67. Nakhoda Putih was described as being particularly partisan in his defence of Kota Tengah interests. It is unlikely that he was one and the same as Raja Putih, the son of Bendahara Putih, which whom Pits had already had dealings since Pits made no mention of any connection and referred to him simply as "one Nakhoda Putih". The title Raja Putih was a common one and, according to Wilkinson *putih*, which means "white", was often used for a six or seventh child, while *hitam*, or "black" was used for ninth and tenth children.

in the third person.<sup>4</sup> The account itself is of considerable interest for the first hand descriptions it contains of conversations with the king and with other important chiefs. It is written in a naive narrative style which is, perhaps, typical of this type of travel writing.<sup>5</sup> The reliability of the report is difficult to assess. References to names and places appear to be generally consistent with what we know about the situation inland then and now. The envoys were no doubt eager to please the Dutch and to give a good account of themselves, but they did not disguise the difficulties they experienced, and their own doubts and hesitations when events took an unpredictable course. The written account to which we have access today is, of course, in Dutch translation which must inevitably compromise the authentic voice of the report and our ability to read it within a Malay literary context. It is, nevertheless, a remarkable first account of an expedition into the Minangkabau interior which provides a view of the political organization of the *darat* in this period.

### The Journey

The envoys followed the Anai route through Kota Tengah up to Batipu and their journey took them through Lubuk Alang, Kepala Alang and "Calou Buara" [See

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<sup>4</sup> Daily notes serving as a report by our emissaries of what was noteworthy on the journey from Padang to the capital of his majesty of Minangkabau, SWK 1670 VOC 1272, ff. 1029v.-1038v.. Kroeskamp used the information contained in this report as evidence for the proposition that Bendahara Putih duped the Dutch between 1666 and 1668 and kept the king in ignorance of events on the coast (Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 96). In fact the September embassy was preceded by a brief exchange of letters which suggest that the king was not completely ignorant about Dutch activities. This exchange was linked with the earlier 1665 visit to the king and since the discussion involves the detailed identification of individual envoys and letters it has been considered in Appendix Two.

<sup>5</sup> Conversations with rulers reported by the European travellers Marco Polo and Fernao Mendez Pinto have the same stilted effect and this may be attributable to the extremely formal style of royal audiences.





MAP 2



Map 2].<sup>6</sup> As with the journey into the interior which was undertaken by Raffles in 1818, the delegation sought permission from the chiefs of each region to pass through their territory and in most cases they appear to have been escorted by armed inhabitants of each of the intermediate regions.<sup>7</sup>

At Batipu the two most prominent *panghulu*, Bendahara Panjang and Bendahara Renda, wished to conclude an agreement with the envoys, which, however, the envoys declined to do before they had met the king.<sup>8</sup> They were told that these two *panghulu*, along with five others, ruled the surrounding districts and that nothing could be done without the knowledge and agreement of all. A later report by Pits mentions four principal chiefs or menteri, the Bendahara Putih of Sungai Tarab, Bendahara Panjang of Batipu, Seripada of Duabelas Kota and the Bendahara of Pariangan.<sup>9</sup> Only the first two of these are specifically identified in the envoy's report, but Bendahara Renda may have been the name of the Bendahara of Pariangan.

From Batipu they travelled to Simabur where the local *panghulu* inquired whether the party had made agreements with their neighbours. These *panghulu* advised them to give advance warning to the inhabitants of the regions through which they intended to pass.<sup>10</sup> The overall impression which the report conveys of this part of the journey is that of a series of discrete but interconnected regions experiencing

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<sup>6</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, ff. 1029v-1030v. The alternative route, which was used by Raffles in 1818, passes through Limau Manis inland to Solok.

<sup>7</sup> S. Raffles (ed.) *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Stamford Raffles*, vol. 2, pp. 388-434.

<sup>8</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, ff. 1030r-v. The word Bendahara is spelt "*Bandara*" or "*Bandhara*" in the report and in other VOC papers. Although this appears to have been the accepted spelling in west Sumatra at the time, I have standardised here to *Bendahara* to avoid a multiplicity of spelling forms and to simplify cross references to the work of other historians. See the discussion above note 83 below.

<sup>9</sup> J.J. Pits, *Memorie* 18th Dec. 1677, SWK 1678 VOC 1328, f. 781v.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 1030v.

tense border relations, highly conscious of who might travel through their territory and preoccupied with neighbourly interaction. A number of the regions are said to have been governed by seven *panghulu* and in two cases there were two principal *panghulu*.

From Simabur it was only a short journey to the capital which was called Negeri.<sup>11</sup> The royal family of Minangkabau were usually represented as having their seat at Pagaruyung, Suruaso or Buo, and Negeri is not a familiar name from other sources. The term *negeri* is a Malay word for settlement or city state and is derived from the Sanskrit *negara* meaning city or capital city. In Minangkabau usage the word is usually pronounced and spelt *nagari* and is used to describe an autonomous region governed by *panghulu*, rather than the state as a whole. Unfortunately there is no further information in the report for the use of this name, although one possibility is that it was used in the Sanskrit sense of city and royal capital. As Map 2 shows many of the centres inland which are mentioned in the envoy's report are quite close to each other, although the hilly nature of the terrain would have added to the time it took to travel between them.

### The Meeting

At Negeri the party were given accommodation at the houses of the first *menteri*, Seri Paduka Maharaja, and the second *menteri*, Lela di Raja, where they waited for four days. In the course of this time they gave customary gifts to the nine *menteri* of Negeri which were said to have been a prerequisite for their audience with the king.<sup>12</sup> Finally the party were invited to the court to which they were conveyed in ceremonial style. The letter which they brought from Pits to the king was carried by

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., f. 1030v-1031r.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., f. 1031r.



Raja di Hilir, and was escorted by *ulubelang*, serving women and *menteri* accompanied by the sound of gongs and musical instruments. They came to an elevated *balai* within which the ruler sat upon a raised dais. Attendants, *menteri* and *ulubelang* lined the sides of the *balai*.<sup>13</sup> The envoys approached the king with proper deference, making their *sembah*, and Raja di Hilir handed Pits' letter to Seri Paduka Maharaja, who took it on his knees to the throne.<sup>14</sup> The letter was read and this was followed, or accompanied, by the playing of gongs and musical instruments. The king then held a simple conversation with the envoys, in which he enquired after the health of the Governor General and Pits, and asked them what age Pits was. The envoys were then invited to chew betel or areca nut and were led out of the king's presence.<sup>15</sup>

Some days later the envoys were again summoned before the king who asked them not to take their letters and gifts to Sungai Tarab or the Duabelas Kota or to enter into any contracts with these two peoples. He offered the envoys the choice of leaving the gifts with him until the war between Sungai Tarab and the Duabelas Kota was over, or of taking them back to Padang. The king's motives are not discussed in the report which records only that the envoys requested permission to consider the matter amongst themselves.<sup>16</sup>

The next audience with the king was a more intimate one, to which the ruler summoned only Nakhoda Putih and Katib Muda. These held a private conversation

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> According to the report the king made a sign that the letter should be opened and read by Fakir Muda who was described as very learned and, with Khatib Seri Negeri, one of the two great priests of the kingdom. Fakir Muda, however, was unable to read the letter, being so troubled (*beroort*) that he almost dropped it. This is not explained. Instead the envoy, Khatib Muda, read the letter.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., f. 1031r-v..

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. ff.1031v-1032r.. Privately the envoys were undecided about what to do with the gifts. They were anxious both to fulfil their mission and not to offend the king.

with the ruler who asked them whether the deputation truly came from the Dutch Commander and the *panghulu* of the coastal regions. They assured him that this was the case and swore to the king that he might have them put to death if it were not true that the Governor General at Batavia had conquered the coastlands for the king, and had sent him this deputation. The envoys described the west coast as the ruler's hereditary lands, which were being governed by the Dutch Company in the ruler's name. The ruler did not respond to this verbally. According to the report he "sat silent and still for a long time, as though delighted and elated". The envoys then withdrew.<sup>17</sup>

This is the passage to which Kroeskamp referred when he wrote that the king "listened in silent amazement" when he was informed about the full course of events on the west coast in 1668.<sup>18</sup> The King's silence may, in fact, be more interesting than Kroeskamp made it sound. Silence and immobility were part of court etiquette in the Malay world. They reflected the ruler's claims to divine status. A Minangkabau-Malay text from Siak describes the installation of the Minangkabau prince, Raja Kecil, at Pagaruyung. During the ceremony he is said to have stared into space, his face "like a flower in bloom and his person glowing".<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Kroeskamp's rendering of the report was at variance with the envoys' own words as given in their report. By their account the king appeared to have sought reassurance and they inferred from his reaction that he was delighted. It is nowhere stated that the ruler was amazed,

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<sup>17</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, ff. 1032r-v. "Hier over sat zijn majst. als verrucht en opgetogen lange stil, sonder een wort te spreken, bequamen hier mede wederom afscheijt."

<sup>18</sup> Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 96. "Een gezantschap van den Compagnie berichte in het najaar van 1668 den vorst, die stom van verbazing toeluisterde, de geheele toedracht van zaken." Leonard Andaya also interprets the ruler's reaction as one of amazement. According to Andaya, the ruler, "could barely repress his disbelief and gratitude when informed in 1667 that the Dutch had 'recovered' his lands on his behalf", *The Kingdom of Johor*, p. 110.

<sup>19</sup> *Siak Chronicle* (Cod. Or. 7304), p. 423.

although the next part of the report does suggest that he was puzzled.

That afternoon the ruler invited Katib Muda back for a further private audience. He asked him, it is said, in all sincerity,

Why do the Dutch write to me and regard me as their king when they are greater and more powerful than I am, the more since they trade and wage war on sea as well as land? What do you think of this? Tell me truly.

Katib Muda replied that

God has filled the Governor General's heart with a spirit of goodness so that he recognises your majesty as the rightful ruler of these lands.<sup>20</sup>

We only have Katib Muda's word for the text of this conversation and the ruler's perplexity may be exaggerated. If we turn to the terms of the letter which Pits sent to the king, however, it becomes clearer why the ruler might have summoned the Padang envoy to ask him what was going on.

The king had other grounds for believing that the Dutch were submitting to his authority. Pits addressed himself to the king in the most flattering and respectful terms, in a letter which, even in Dutch translation, displays recognisable Malay idiom. Pits directed his letter to the "High and mighty Sultan Ahmad Syah Iskandar Zulkarnain, emperor of the celebrated and gold rich Minangkabau." The letter opened with a long list of compliments and titles. All the coastal chiefs were named and they, including Pits, and all other subjects on the coast, great and small, young and old, male and female, were said to stand under the ruler's authority and to owe him obedience.<sup>21</sup> This phraseology is reminiscent of the Malay letters which Pits and others had already received from the interior. The king was flattered with references to his "famous power and authority" and induced to exercise his "renowned wisdom to

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<sup>20</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f. 1032v..

<sup>21</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, ff. 1027r-v.

quell the unrest in the interior and thus extend your own power".<sup>22</sup>

The letter Pits sent to Bendahara Putih was couched in similar terms, but with a particularly religious tone, conveyed in references to a mutual Dutch/Minangkabau quest for God's blessing.<sup>23</sup> The Dutch, according to Pits, sought in their "innermost souls" to mediate in the Minangkabau disturbances.<sup>24</sup> The letter to Bendahara Putih also seemed to attempt to exploit Minangkabau formulations of the past in claiming that the Dutch sought to restore the west coast to the populous place it was in the "days of Paduka Seri Sultan Iskandar Dulkarnaini" or Alexander the Great.<sup>25</sup> Pits, in his anxiety to cultivate the royal family, and to enter into an advantageous relationship with the Minangkabau interior, may have over exploited the Minangkabau-Malay idiom and helped to arouse expectations within the court from which the Company would later wish to back away. It is easy to imagine that these submissive letters would have been kept, and prized, by their recipients and there is evidence from later years that such letters were indeed preserved at the court.<sup>26</sup>

The report of this visit to the court thus offers some preliminary insights into the position of Sultan Ahmad Syah. We learn of a respectful and ceremonially oriented court at which the king's elevated position was marked by ritual practices similar to those described in Malay court texts such as the *Sejarah Melayu* and the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and observed by foreign visitors to courts such as Melaka and Aceh in a similar period. The exact location of this court is not defined, but, at a later stage of

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<sup>22</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f. 1027v.

<sup>23</sup> Letter from Pits to Bendahara Putih at Sungai Tarab, SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f. 1029r.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., f. 1029v. "Dat wij uijt het binnenste van onse ziele trachten UEds twisten te helpen bemiddelen."

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., f. 1029r. "Deselve te populeren als ten tijden van Paducca Sirij Sulthan Escander Doel Corneni sal. [saliger] geschiet is."

<sup>26</sup> See Chapter Eight below.

the envoy's report, the king is said to have been at Suruaso and to have bidden the envoys to "come to the *Negeri*" to receive his final orders and his "*estime*" for Pits.<sup>27</sup> This term may be a translation of the Malay word *hormat* ("honour" or "respect"), and the king's presence at Suruaso, where we later learn his cousin and adopted son resided, implies a close relationship between his own court and this centre.<sup>28</sup>

The ruler's role in the gold trade is not discussed in detail in the report, but he did undertake to send gold traders to the coast. His ability to involve himself in these matters was demonstrated when, later in the expedition, 25 *menteri* presented themselves to Katib Muda at Simabur at the request of the king.<sup>29</sup> They announced themselves to be representatives of Suruaso, Padang Ganting, "Pangayer", "Lubo Tero", Palangki and Air Tabit<sup>30</sup> who said that they had always taken their gold to Jambi and Inderagiri, but had been informed of the king's wish that they should henceforth take it to Padang.<sup>31</sup> The ruler's intervention appears to have had an effect on the supply of gold to the west coast, at least in the short term and, after the envoys returned, Pits reported to his superiors that the gold trade had improved.

The important role of the Duabelas Kota and Sungai Tarab and the tension between them concerning their mutual and respective relations with the king is also reflected here. This friction was one of the original reasons for the embassy and, in Chapter Four, we saw how important the ruler's role was in balancing and accommodating competition between the two groups.

We do not know why the ruler tried to prevent the Padang envoys from visiting

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<sup>27</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f. 1037r.

<sup>28</sup> For reference to Raja Suruaso see p. 117 below. This was also the king's son in law.

<sup>29</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, ff. 1037r-v.

<sup>30</sup> It has not been possible to identify all of these place names on modern maps.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Rueb refers to this in "Het Westsumatraanse Gold Handel", p. 26.

Sungai Tarab and Duabelas Kota and distributing gifts and letters there, but, in the course of their journey, the envoys decided to ignore the king's request and to follow their original instructions to visit both regions.<sup>32</sup> At Sungai Tarab they learnt more about this competition. The Bendahara told them that he was not in a position to send his people to the coast because the inhabitants of Duabelas Kota "Imagined that he, Bendahara Putih, had assumed so much honour and authority that it challenged that of the king."<sup>33</sup> The Bendahara rejected the charge, but the envoys were uncertain what to make of his role since it had also by then become clear that the gifts and letter from the Governor General, which were brought back from Batavia by Nakhoda Marabat (alias Seri Paduka Maharaja Lela) in 1667, had not reached the king and had been concealed by the Bendahara.

Bendahara Putih's assertive role in 1667 is also suggested by the ruler's pleasure in the envoys' approach and by his letter in reply to Pits which referred to that which was secret now being revealed. He also expressed his gratitude that Pits had "washed from his sight the blackness which had besmirched him for so long", which may have been a reference to the shame of Acehnese control over west Sumatra.<sup>34</sup> All this would seem to indicate that Bendahara Putih did indeed keep his correspondence with Pits in 1667, including the *stadhouder* arrangement, a secret from the king and confused the Dutch into thinking that they were corresponding with the ruler.

How should the Bendahara's behaviour be understood? According to the Minangkabau text, the *Kaba Cinduo Mato*, relations with the coastal regions, the

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<sup>32</sup> The discussions which took place between the envoys as to how to respond to the king's request are recorded on f. 1031v-1032r of the report and on f. 1034r.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 1036r.

<sup>34</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f. 1039r.

collection of taxes and the organization of trade were the responsibility of the four chief ministers of Minangkabau, the *Basa nan Empat Balai*. These are said to have had the right to trade at their own discretion and were responsible to no-one for their actions on the coast.<sup>35</sup> We might see Bendahara Putih's actions in this light, yet this does not seem to have applied to the situation in 1668. The Bendahara's actions clearly offended the chiefs of the *Duabelas Kota/Lima Kaum* and the report implies that the Padang envoys found him uncooperative. The presence of the Dutch in West Sumatra contributed a new element which may have aggravated the existing tension between the leaders of the two *laras*.<sup>36</sup>

Before leaving the interior the Padang envoys contracted a series of agreements with representatives of the gold producing regions and of those through which traders were obliged to pass when bringing their goods to the coast. As might be expected in a Minangkabau context, the conclusion of mutually satisfying agreements appears to have been an important aspect of political life in the *darat*. These agreements, and the deliberations which preceded them, throw some light on the nature of the disputes inland. The envoys travelled around the Tanah Datar region meeting groups of *panghulu* and calling them to meetings at Pariangan, Batipu and Simabur. The *panghulu* were exhorted to bring their gold to the west coast in the case of producing regions and not to obstruct the trade in the case of those who lived in the intermediate territories.<sup>37</sup> As Rueb suggests, the *laras* system was an important factor in these trade networks; a particular concern voiced by the *panghulu* was their wish to receive

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<sup>35</sup> J.L. van der Toorn, (trans. and ed.), *Tjindoer Mato*, VBG, XLV, 1891, p. 8. It might be significant here that the *Kaba* does nominate one lord who is said to have been keen to accumulate power in his own right and to act independently. This was the Bendahara of Batipu, known as the "Tiger of Koto Piliang".

<sup>36</sup> Friction between the rulers, or the great lords, inland was already mentioned by Pires in the sixteenth century. See p. 34 above.

<sup>37</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, ff. 1033r-1038v.

equal treatment at the coast and this appears to have reflected competition between members of the two *laras*.<sup>38</sup> The envoys reassured a group of *panghulu* who assembled at Batipu that the Commander "loved the "*daras*" (*laras*) equally."<sup>39</sup>

Although it is difficult to identify some of the Malay place names used in the report or establish their *laras* affiliation, most place names mentioned can be divided into regions which were encouraged to send gold to the coast and regions which were accused of blocking trade. Broadly speaking the individually named villages of the interior fall into the former category while several of the *kota* federations such as Duabelas, Duapuluh Kota and Sembilan Kota fall into the latter.<sup>40</sup> The people of Duapuluh Kota also produced gold and a deputation from their region came to Simabur to ask the envoys why they had dealt first with the inland "*darataens*" when it was they who "were the door and the key with which the gold mines could be opened and closed".<sup>41</sup> The envoys concluded agreements with all these groups of *panghulu* who swore oaths for mutual defence and promised harmony in the future. There is no suggestion here of the Bodi Caniago groups exhibiting an antagonistic attitude towards the king and towards royal authority as later, nineteenth century, descriptions of the

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<sup>38</sup> See, for instance, an agreement made at Batipu with the panghulus of Batipu, Gunung, "Pemisawan", "Jaloo", Tambangan, Pandai Sikat, "Panjali", Air Angkat, Kota Lawa and Tagan, SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f. 1035r. These desire to be treated equally with other hill peoples is also mentioned by the *menteri* who came to meet the envoys at the ruler's request, f. 1037v. Other groups demanded that they receive gifts if they brought their gold to the west coast, f. 1035r. Some identification of these place names is made by Rueb in *Het Westsumatraanse Goud Handel*.

<sup>39</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f. 1035.

<sup>40</sup> In addition to the 25 *menteri* sent by the ruler and mentioned in note 39 above, regions which are mentioned in relation to bringing down their gold are Simabur, Mesjid, Sellahan, Kota Borong, 7 Kota, "Gorgul", Gologandang, Padang Lawas, Belembang Kiawai and Sungai Air (all of which are mentioned of f. 1034r. of the report), Gunung, Pemisawan, Tombang, Pandai Sikat, Penjali, Air Angkat, Kota Lawas, Tagau and Batipu (see f.1034v). Some of the regions which are mentioned in relation to blocking the paths duplicate those named above, these include Pariangan, Batipu, Simabur, Gunung. Also mentioned in relation to holding up trade are Sungai Bakar, 12 Kota, 9 Kota and 20 Kota.

<sup>41</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f. 1036v.



*laras* suggest. Bodi Caniago *panghulu*, including those of the Duabelas Kota, swore an oath that they would attack anyone who opposed the intention of the king's letter.<sup>42</sup>

The Padang envoys eventually turned for home, travelling in a stately retinue, with ambassadors from the king who carried his letters to Pits and to the Governor General. The letters and the gifts which the king sent to Padang were intended to emphasize his high status, and they help to tell us something about the way in which Minangkabau royal authority was portrayed. A horse each had already been given to Nakhoda Putih and Katib Muda. Horses were a common gift from Minangkabau rulers. To Pits the king sent gold, which was intended for the Governor General, and a new title for himself Panglima Cahaya Raja. As a sign (*tanda*) of this new dignity he was also granted the important royal privileges of using a white parasol and a pike [probably a *tombak*].<sup>43</sup>

The king's radiance is conveyed in the letter not just by means of distributing signs of honour to his servants, but in the words used to describe him. The Dutch copy of the ruler's letter to Pits passes over a "string of compliments and honourable titles"<sup>44</sup>, but, as we shall see, these verbal attributes were an essential, and frequently restated, aspect of his authority.

Following these royal titles the king exhorted his subjects on the west coast to love his name in the "*cotonba*" [*khutba*]. *Khutba*, an Arabic word denoting "discourse or form of words", refers to the formulae such as "the praises of Mohammed, the prayers for Islam and the Caliph recited by the khatib at the mosque-service".<sup>45</sup> We do not know what Malay term was used here, but it was probably *memuji* (to praise, glorify

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<sup>42</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f. 1035v.

<sup>43</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f. 1039r.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., "Na een reep van complementen ende eertitulen is den brief van inhoud als volgt...".

<sup>45</sup> Wilkinson, *Malay-English Dictionary*, p. 595.

or laud) or *menyembah* (to make obeisance or worship), both terms which are used in royal letters from Minangkabau at a later period. The Minangkabau ruler was probably instructing his west coast subjects here in his caliphal role as a royal intermediary between man and God. Caliphs in Baghdad and the Mughul emperors had the *khutba* read in their name and this was regarded as a sign of sovereignty and of the rulers role as viceroy of God.<sup>46</sup>

It was suggested in the previous chapter that the ruler's name was an important force in the Minangkabau polity. This is emphasised in the letters sent to the coast by Sultan Ahmad Syah. The name of this ruler, an heir of Iskandar Zulkarnain, was, the letter states, "held in no small esteem", and Pits was honoured for his role in "nourishing" the ruler's glory.<sup>47</sup> In the letter to the Governor General the ruler described himself as the heir of Iskandar Zulkarnain and king "under the clouds of Minangkabau".<sup>48</sup> He sent the Governor General 1 1/4 *tahil* of gold as a "sign" of enduring unity. Both letters were written and signed at the king's palace called Bunga Setanggi.<sup>49</sup>

The expedition inland brought the Dutch into direct contact with the ruler and

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<sup>46</sup> Bamber Gascoigne, *The Great Moghuls*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1987, pages 12 and 26.

<sup>47</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f. 1039r. "...mijn name daer door in geen cleijn achtinge comt, dewijl den Commandeur een beschermer mijner onderdanen ende den voeder mijner heerlijkheijt is.."

<sup>48</sup> Dagh-Register, vol. 18 (1668-9), p. 276. See also SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f.1038v. The letters from Sultan Ahmad syah to Pits and the Governor General can be consulted in translation in the Dagh-Register as well as Overgecomen Brieven from Sumatra's Westkust. The translations from Malay differ in detail, although their general meaning is the same.

<sup>49</sup> "*Bonga Satankeij*". Setanggi is a word used for incense, Bunga Setanggi might then refer to a flower smelling of incense. In *Undang-undang Minangkabau 1* "Boenga Satangke" is mentioned as the place name in the interior, where, in the early days of Minangkabau history, representatives of the two *laras* met to consider the removal of the ruler "Yang dipertuan" from Sungai Tarab to Batu Patah. We do not know any more about the significance of this name, but it clearly had associations with the early history of the Minangkabau royal house and its accommodation with the two *laras*. This is the name for the Sultan's Istana in the *Hikayat Aceh*, see T. Iskandar (ed.), *De Hikayat Aceh*, 's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958, pp. 71-2 and 164.

clarified, to some extent, what had been happening in 1666-7. For historians the report made by the envoys provides precious information about the role and influence of the royal family. But there is more to be learnt about conditions inland in this period.

## Disputed Succession

After the 1668 mission inland the Minangkabau court involved itself more actively with the west coast. Both Sultan Ahmad Syah and his cousin and adopted son, the Raja of Suruaso, sent deputations on behalf of dissident *panghulu* from Kota Tengah who had been ejected from their *negeri* by the Company.<sup>50</sup> Relations between the court and the VOC nevertheless remained cordial. Then, in 1674, Pits informed his superiors in Batavia that Sultan Ahmad Syah had died and had been replaced by his nephew.<sup>51</sup>

By the following year it was clear that the succession was to be disputed. The two principal candidates were the dead king's nephew, his sister's son, Yang Dipertuan Maharaja Diraja, and his adopted son, Yang Dipertuan Inderma of Suruaso. Bendahara Putih was also reported to have had aspirations to succeed the king.<sup>52</sup> The conflict which surrounded this dispute was a nuisance for the Company. It spread from the interior and engaged the coastal worlds of east and west Sumatra, affecting the safety of pathways and the passage of goods to the coast. Pits and others referred to this as a period of turbulence and disturbance.

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<sup>50</sup> See Chapter Six below. In a VOC letter the Raja Suruaso is described as the "genaamden soon van den regerenden Coningh in minanghcabou", SWK 1670 VOC 1272, ff. 1046r-v.. The term "genaamden" implies named or adopted. And in 1677 Pits referred to the same prince as "d'geadopteerde soon Jang de Pertuan Inderma", SWK 1678 VOC 1328 f, 781v-783r.

<sup>51</sup> Pits to Batavia 21 March 1674, SWK 1675 VOC 1302, f. 270r.

<sup>52</sup> Pits to Batavia, 16 November 1674, SWK 1675 VOC 1304, f. 135v.

The implications of the succession dispute went beyond the matter of mere inconvenience. If kingship had only a marginal impact upon political life in Minangkabau then it is surprising that tenure of a "merely sacral" position should cause such disturbance and have an impact upon trade. The furore caused by this and later Minangkabau succession contests in fact underlines the importance of kingship in the Minangkabau political system and a consideration of the 1674 dispute will contribute to an understanding of the distribution of authority inland. The following discussion, therefore will examine the situation between 1674-80 before looking more closely at the principles employed to determine royal succession in Minangkabau.

VOC reports suggest that the four chief ministers of Minangkabau were closely involved in the dispute.<sup>53</sup> According to Pits, they had an important role in the choosing of the old king's successor, and it may be that the *laras* affiliation of these chiefs had an influence on the dispute.<sup>54</sup> In a report of 16 November, Pits noted that the choosing of a successor was held up by the chiefs in the interior, "some of whom favoured the old king's son, while the others wanted the ruler's nephew".<sup>55</sup> The chiefs were said to have prevented their people from trading on the coast. It was only in 1677 that Pits had news of a compromise in this dispute and again he attributed the delay to disagreement among the four chiefs.<sup>56</sup>

In his *Memorie* of 1677, Pits reported that a compromise in the succession

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<sup>53</sup> Pits' *Memorie*, 18 December, 1677, SWK 1678 VOC 1328, f. 781v. As we have seen, Pits identifies these as the Bendahara Putih at Sungai Tarab, the Bendahara Panjang at Batipu (both of whom were encountered during the 1669 embassy inland), the Bendahara of Pariangan and "Seripada" of the Duabelas Kota.

<sup>54</sup> Three of these place names are associated with traditional Koto Piliang centres but, from what we have already learned of *laras* conflict in this period, "Seripada" of the Duabelas Kota is likely to have belonged to Bodi Caniago.

<sup>55</sup> SWK 1675 VOC 1304, f. 135v. See also SWK 1678 VOC 1328, f.781v-783r..

<sup>56</sup> SWK 1677 VOC 1328, f.781r-v.

dispute had been reached by means of dividing the spheres of the kingdom in which the two principal candidates would exercise their authority.<sup>57</sup> The inland areas closer to the east coast were to be ruled by the nephew, Maharaja Diraja, seated at Negeri, whom Pits described as the "lawful heir", and the western lands were to be under the authority of the adopted son, the Yang Dipertuan Inderma of Suruaso.<sup>58</sup> The basis for Pits' judgment of what was legitimate appears to have been his information that the succession was carried through the female line. According to him, the nephew was the "rightful heir and from the female line, which is the way that descent is reckoned here".<sup>59</sup>

Two important points emerge from Pits' letter therefore: firstly that royal descent was reckoned through women, and secondly that a new arrangement was instituted in this period to contain the aspirations of different branches of the royal family. This information challenges the commonly held idea that the Minangkabau kings maintained a patrilineal succession in contrast to the rest of Minangkabau society.<sup>60</sup> De Josselin de Jong argued that part of the Minangkabau king's symbolic function was to represent the male principle in Minangkabau society and he based this suggestion on the assumption of patrilineal descent. The royal succession issue is, therefore, an important one for understanding the position of the royal house.

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<sup>57</sup> SWK 1678 VOC 1328, f. 782r.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> SWK 1678 VOC 1328, f. 781v-783r. This is elaborated in a 1683 report by the then Commander, Joan van Leene, who stated that, "If the kings do not always beget sons from women of their own family, the sisters's son shall succeed, this son, however, will be from a mother of royal descent, thus contributing until now to a complete succession". J. van Leene to Batavia, 6 January, 1683, SWK 1683 VOC 1386, f. 1009r.

<sup>60</sup> This question has also been discussed in Andaya, *Kingdom of Johor*, pp. 329-332. For the contrary view see De Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan*, p. 10 and passim. For a discussion of tension between matrilineal and patrilineal tendencies in the *rantau* see J. Kathirithamby-Wells, "The Inderapura Sultanate: The Foundations of its rise and decline from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries", *Indonesia*, vol.21, (1976), pp.73-6.

The accommodation which was reached in 1677 between the old king's descendants and the great lords inland had a long term effect on the organization of the court in Tanah Datar. Later succession disputes occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but in the main the Minangkabau royal house appears to have accommodated, henceforth, the existence of two royal centres in Tanah Datar, Negeri (as it was known in Dutch sources in the 1660's-1690's) and Suruaso. In later VOC reports the title Sultan Ahmad Syah (which was adopted by the nephew) is associated with Negeri and Sultan Inderma Syah with Suruaso.<sup>61</sup> The two branches of the family intermarried with each other and their royal titles appear to have been transmitted through women within a matrilineal pattern of residence.

Thus, ideally, an incumbent Inderma Syah of Suruaso would marry a princess of the Negeri court, probably Ahmad Syah's elder sister. Their son would be brought up at her home in Negeri and, ideally, become an Ahmad Syah of Negeri whose father was an Inderma Syah at Suruaso. Similarly Ahmad Syah would marry a princess, ideally a royal sister, of the Suruaso court. Their son would be brought up in Suruaso and inherit the title Inderma Syah of Suruaso, although his father was an Ahmad Syah of Negeri. Matrilineal residence accounted for the fact that an Ahmad Syah had an Inderma Syah as his father and vice versa as recorded in letters to the Dutch.<sup>62</sup> This pattern differs slightly from the royal succession pattern outlined by Leonard Andaya in 1975.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> In his description of the new division of authority inland van Leene also refers to Negeri as the seat of the old king's nephews.

<sup>62</sup> As Andaya points out, an Inderma Syah of Suruaso wrote to the Dutch in 1702 and referred to "my father Sultan Ahmad Syah, son of the Sultan Chalifatoulla Indrama Syah", SWK 1703 VOC 1664 f. 117-18. See also Andaya, *Kingdom of Johor*, p. 330.

<sup>63</sup> The difference is one of emphasis with more stress placed here on the existence of two positions and on a matrilineal residence pattern where women did not move, but remained in their lineage house.

The changes described here appear to have been part of an ongoing adjustment to circumstances and, while it is possible to determine a general model on the basis of VOC sources, it is doubtful whether this always worked neatly. The two courts competed with each other during the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but in general two positions seem to have endured. In 1727 a Minangkabau king wrote to the Dutch describing himself as a prince of "this land which is ruled by two kings".<sup>64</sup>

Several points emerge from the 1674 dispute and the manner in which it was resolved. Firstly it is clear that the succession mattered and that local people inland and on the coast were interested in the issue. The Dutch noticed that it disrupted trade and communication with the interior.<sup>65</sup> An indication of the far-reaching effect of the dispute appears in the text of an oath reproduced in the *Dagh-Register* of 1680, which representatives of all the west coast allies were required to sign. It referred to the conflict between the four "Bandhares" or chief ministers of Minangkabau who each wanted a say in the succession. The people in general were exhorted by the Company not to become involved in the succession dispute. When the new king was chosen, moreover, they must promise to pay him no more than the usual annual *sembah*. Any false letters of command, or "bevel-brieven" sent from the interior to the west coast population should be ignored.<sup>66</sup> These efforts to prevent locals from responding to the dispute tends to suggest that they were already involved and interested.

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<sup>64</sup> SWK 1728 VOC 2074, f. 117. Further evidence that more than one royal centre was active in the eighteenth century appears in a letter from Sultan Inderma Syah in 1703, in which he describes himself as the son of Sultan Ahmad Syah and "chief of the kings" in Minangkabau. SWK 1704 VOC 1677, f. 20r.

<sup>65</sup> In 1677 Pits reported that no letters from the court had been received for four to five years. There was much trouble surrounding the succession issue and a frustrating difficulty in understanding what was actually happening. SWK 1678 VOC 1328, f782r.

<sup>66</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 28 (1680), p. 716. It was stated that, until a single new king was chosen, the Company would act as "sovereign protector" of the people.

A second point concerns the basis upon which the contestants were supported. The *Dagh-Register* mentions that the Yang Dipertuan Inderma had indeed sent "bevel-brieven" to the coast and, judging from the Dutch instruction, it was thought likely that these would have an impact upon the coastal population.<sup>67</sup> This suggests that it might be the ruler's link with his people and the words he transmitted to them which effected his support, rather than just questions of descent and the proper observance of tradition. This is also implied by Dutch comments on the contestants. The nephews were said to be at odds with each other and to have taken "little trouble to consolidate their position". Whereas Inderma Syah might have had an advantage in popular support, Van Leene implies, because he "had committed himself to the priesthood".<sup>68</sup> Again, the suggestion is there that communications from the ruler did matter in local society.

Thirdly, the 1674 dispute may have had an impact on subsequent relations between the courts and the coastal regions. The pattern of succession and intermarriage outlined above may have produced an unusual number of princes - younger brothers, nephews and cousins of the rulers - who could not be accommodated within the succession and who sought to pursue status and fortune in the *rantau*. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries numerous Minangkabau princes and royal pretenders appeared in the coastal regions of east and west Sumatra. Many of these must indeed have had reasonable claims to royal status. This diffusion of aspirant princes was to have an important effect on the currency and impact of Minangkabau sovereignty in the *rantau*. As Sumatrans became increasingly

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Van Leene to Batavia, 6 January 1683, SWK 1684 VOC 1386, f.1009v., "zigh al voor lang tot 't priesterschap begeben". We do not know what this means, but it may indicate that he was a particularly devout Muslim who had joined a *tarekat* or undertaken some other form of religious instruction.



disillusioned with the VOC, Minangkabau princes were on hand to act as leaders and focal points for resistance.

These issues will be considered in more detail below. At this point in the discussion there is another matter which deserves attention. Namely the related questions of whether or not Minangkabau was ruled by three kings and the existence and location of a court in the eastern part of the interior. A consideration of these issues has been postponed until now in order that seventeenth century Dutch evidence can be brought to bear on what is already known about these problems. Before looking more closely at the Dutch sources, however, it is necessary to establish the nature of the existing evidence.

### Three Kings

#### i) The *Kaba Cinduo Mato*

Most studies of Minangkabau, scholarly and popular, which refer to the structure of the inland kingdom, mention that there were three kings each with defined titles and roles. These were Raja nan Tiga Selo (the kings of the three seats): namely, the Raja Adat, ruler over custom, seated at Buo in the eastern part of the darat; the Raja Ibadat, or king of religion, seated at Sumpur Kudus; and the ruler of the world, Raja Alam, seated at Pagaruyung.<sup>69</sup> Traditions also mention four chief ministers, the Basa nan Empat Balai and these had defined titles and places of residence. This image of the kingdom has come to be accepted as representing the facts of Minangkabau history, and it is reinforced, to some extent, by the early description of

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<sup>69</sup> The title Raja nan Tiga Selo is associated with three massive decorated stones at Lima Kaum, which are thought to have been royal seats.

Pires who mentioned three rulers in the interior. If we examine scholarly references, and the sources for most popular writing about the kingdom, we find, however, that there is one basic source for this information. This is the *Kaba Tjindua Mato*, a text which is enormously popular in Minangkabau and which has achieved the status of a "state myth".<sup>70</sup>

As Taufik Abdullah points out, the Kaba is a "standard reference work for Minangkabau *adat* theoreticians and guardians".<sup>71</sup> Abdullah's choice of the term "guardians" conveys the extent to which the accepted accounts of Minangkabau's past have been enshrined as an authorized version of events.

The date of the *Kaba Tjindua Mato* is uncertain. The earliest known text was published by van der Toorn in 1891, but all texts of the basic narrative are likely to have been modified and augmented over time. The narrative of most texts closes with the loss of the west coast to Aceh, which we know took place in the early seventeenth century. On the basis of this and other internal evidence, Abdullah has suggested that the Kaba might be considered as a "model for the Minangkabau state of the seventeenth or early eighteenth century".<sup>72</sup> But, despite the widespread use this text as a source for the organization of the "traditional" Minangkabau kingdom, the ideal state it depicts has rarely been tested against historical evidence. It will be useful,

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<sup>70</sup> Taufik Abdullah, "Some Notes on the *Kaba Tjindua Mato*: An Example of Minangkabau Traditional Literature", *Indonesia*, Vol 9, (1970), p. 3. Most scholarly references to the three kings of Minangkabau can be traced back to the *Kaba*. For example, Kato, in *Matriliney and Migration*, p. 38 refers to de Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan* (1960), p. 103 who refers to Westenenk, *De Minangkabausche Nagari* whose reference on p. 8 of the 1919 edition is to the *Kaba Tjindua Mato*. Dobbin refers to Westenenk's, "Opstellen over Minangkabau I" which uses the *Kaba* as a source and Kathirithamby Wells refers to the text as a source for the tripartite division of Minangkabau in her article, "Myth and Reality: Minangkabau Institutional Traditions in the Rantau", p. 122.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 3. As Abdullah notes, "Almost all books on Minangkabau *adat* written by indigenous *adat* theoreticians are to some extent based on the *Kaba Tjindua Mato*, as are a considerable number of *adat* sayings".

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

therefore, to compare seventeenth century evidence gleaned from VOC reports against the picture represented in the *Kaba*.

The reader will already realise that there are grounds for comparison. Four powerful chief ministers, or Bendaharas, are mentioned in VOC sources, just as they are in the text and, in some cases, these carry similar titles.<sup>73</sup> Not all these titles are comparable, however, and there are also major differences between their locations as described in the *Kaba Cinduo Mato* and in seventeenth century Dutch sources.

In the *Kaba* these are listed as the Bendahara of Sungai Tarab, the Kadi of Padang Ganting, the Mankhudum of Sumanik and Tuan Panjang of Suruaso, also known as the Indomo of Suruaso.<sup>74</sup> From Dutch records we can determine that the Bendahara of Sungai Tarab was clearly an important position in the seventeenth century.<sup>75</sup> No reference to the Kadi of Padang Ganting has been uncovered in seventeenth century VOC sources, although this region is mentioned and was involved, at one time, in a conflict with Suruaso. Neither has it been possible to identify the Mankhudum in seventeenth century sources, although the Tuan Panjang of Suruaso may be identifiable in part. During the 1668 embassy inland a Bendahara Panjang was identified as first *panghulu* of Batipu. The Indomo, is often associated with Suruaso in versions of the *Kaba* and other Minangkabau traditions, and it seems likely that this is an adaptation of the seventeenth century royal title Inderma Syah which is consistently identified with Suruaso in Dutch records.<sup>76</sup> The 1668 report also

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<sup>73</sup> It should be noted that four is the number of chief ministers, or *menteri*, usually found in Malay kingdoms.

<sup>74</sup> Toorn, "Tjindoer Mata", p.8, see also M. Rasjid Manggis (ed.), *Kaba Cindue Mato*, Bukittinggi: Pustaka Sa'adijah, 1972, p. 11.

<sup>75</sup> In the *Kaba* this Bendahara is portrayed as an expert in *adat* matters.

<sup>76</sup> This was also noticed by Andaya, *Kingdom of Johor*, p. 330. As we saw above Pits identified the four principal chiefs as the Bendahara Putih of Sungai Tarab, Bendahara Panjang of Batipu, Seripada of Duabelas Kota and the Bendahara of Pariangan.

mentions a Bendahara Renda who may have been the Bendahara of Pariangan.

It is worth noting here that the titles of the four ministers, the Basa nan Empat Balai, which appear in the Kaba do figure in letters sent out from the royal courts in the early nineteenth century. It seems that the institution of Basa nan Empat Balai was still developing in the late seventeenth century. Four chief ministers, or "Bandhares", were clearly of great importance within the kingdom when the VOC arrived and it was they who were responsible for selecting a ruler from the available princely candidates. Not all of these chiefs were yet known by their later titles or places of residence, however, and, in the case of the Indomo the title was still a royal one.

If we turn to the three rulers mentioned in the Kaba, the Raja nan Tiga Selo, we find, again, that the *Kaba Cinduo Mato* image of the kingdom differs from that provided by seventeenth century sources. VOC servants make no mention of the Raja nan Tiga Selo as an institution, neither did any of the rulers who corresponded with the Dutch at Padang or Melaka in the seventeenth century use the titles Raja Adat, Raja Ibadat and Raja Alam.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, it would be surprising to find that the conceptual categorization which these titles imply was expressed in the institutional fabric of a seventeenth century Southeast Asian kingdom. Formal separations between the spheres of custom, religion and politics tend to belong to a later age.

This suggests that we should be cautious about using the *Kaba Cinduo Mato* as a model for the Minangkabau polity in the seventeenth century. General themes and patterns of behaviour depicted in the text may certainly reflect the Minangkabau past. We know, for instance, that there was often more than one ruler of Minangkabau in the period under consideration. But the details of that past cannot necessarily be found

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<sup>77</sup> The title Raja Gagar Alam does emerge in the records towards the end of the seventeenth century, however this is not identified as a distinct position but rather as a royal title.

in what may well be a much later composition.

Having made this qualification, it should be acknowledged that students of Minangkabau history have had good reason to suppose that there may have been three kings in Minangkabau in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One of the earliest European references to Minangkabau mentions that the kingdom had three rulers. This was the Portuguese traveller, Tomé Pires.

## ii) Pires

In 1511 Pires described the rulers as follows:

The kings of Menangkabau are three. The chief one is called *Raja Cunci Teras*, which is the place where he resides; the second is called *Raja Bamdar*, the brother of the king already mentioned; the third is called *Raja Bonco* or *Buus*. These are the kings of Menangkabau. The first they say has been a Mohammedan for a short time-almost fifteen years; the [other] two they say are still heathens. These often quarrel and there is war between them most of the time.<sup>78</sup>

According to Pires the Muslim ruler had been converted by his wife, a sister of the Sultan of Melaka.<sup>79</sup>

Pires did not visit the interior of Sumatra and his account predates the period under examination by over 150 years, but it raises some intriguing questions: was the tension between these rulers similar to the succession problems of the seventeenth century; is this an early description of the *Raja nan Tiga Selo*; or does the tense tripartite relationship mentioned by Pires reflect the kind of relations between the *laras* chiefs and the ruler in Tanah Datar reported by the Dutch in the 1660's; and, if any of these interpretations are applicable, what are the implications for the role of Sultan Ahmad Syah, the ruler of Tanah Datar encountered by the VOC?

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<sup>78</sup> Cortesão, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, vol. I, p. 164.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 248.

At least one historian has suggested that Pires' three rulers were probably one king and two *laras* chiefs and we may consider this possibility first.<sup>80</sup> In addition to the known importance of the traditional Minangkabau ancestors Datuk Katumanggungan and Datuk Perpatih nan Sebatang in Minangkabau this reading is encouraged by Pires' reference to Sungai Tarab, seat of the Bendahara Putih in the seventeenth century.<sup>81</sup> We need not assume, though, that the "King" who lived there at the beginning of the sixteenth century was the Bendahara Putih. It is possible that Sungai Tarab was, at one time, the seat of the king rather than the Bendahara. One of the earliest copies of the *Undang-Undang Minangkabau* contains a reference to the two Minangkabau ancestors and founders of the *laras* agreeing to the removal of the Yang Dipertuan from Sungai Tarab to Batu Patah because his rule at Sungai Tarab was too forceful.<sup>82</sup> In the period when Pires was writing, then, a king, rather than the Bendahara, may have had his seat at Sungai Tarab.

Pires' other designations are equally uncertain and suggestive. The name Raja Bamdar might correspond with the term "Bandara" or "Bandhara" which is the name the Dutch record for Bendahara Putih in the seventeenth century, but this identification is not without difficulties. Pires usually used the spelling "*Bembara*" or "*Bendara*" for the title Bendahara and *Bandar* or "harbour" is therefore also a possible

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<sup>80</sup> According to Dobbin's reading, "The first concrete evidence we have is that given by Tomé Pires at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when political authority in the Minangkabau world was divided between the Bendaharas of Sungai Tarab and Lima Kaum and the royal family at Buo, whom Pires calls the three kings of Minangkabau, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 67. See also Kathirithamby-Wells, "Myth and Reality", p. 121.

<sup>81</sup> It is not hard to see a link between Cunci Teras and Sungai Tarab especially since Pires, and other Portuguese travellers, used "c" for the letter "s" in Malay place names.

<sup>82</sup> E. Netscher, "Verzameling van Overlevering", p. 52. This is also cited in de Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan*, p. 110.

reading for this word.<sup>83</sup> Both titles, Raja Bandara and Raja Bandar imply some responsibility for the coastal regions.<sup>84</sup> In either case Pires uses the title "raja" and the fact that the Raja Bamdar is the king's brother implies that the position he held was probably close to the royal succession.

The third ruler was "Raja Bonco or Buus". "Buus" could be Buo, in the eastern part of the Minangkabau highlands, but it is not clear whether Pires intended his "or" to indicate a different name or an alternative spelling for "Bonco".<sup>85</sup> Pires uses the term "Bonco" elsewhere in the *Suma Oriental*. In his chapter on Melaka the term appears to stand for "Bongsu" which is a Malay word for "the youngest".<sup>86</sup> Bongsu is a plausible name for a member of the Minangkabau royal family. We shall see below that, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Dutch came into contact with two Minangkabau kings who called themselves Raja Muda ("the young raja") and Raja Bongsu (the youngest), both of whom appear to have been associated with an eastern court which may have been situated at Buo.

This survey leaves us, then, with the possible scenario of a principal ruler seated at Sungai Tarab in Tanah Datar, who married the princess of Melaka and was the first to be converted, and two other rulers, a Raja Bendahara or Raja over the ports (Bandar) and a younger or junior ruler who may have been seated at Buo, both of whom may have had responsibility for the *rantau* regions to the west and east. Pires' reference to conflict between the rulers is intriguing. It is not clear whether

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<sup>83</sup> I am indebted to Dr Pierre-Yves Manguin for this point and for his advice on the passage. Pires uses *Bendara* with reference to Melaka (Cortêsão, *Suma Oriental*, p. p. 249). The Portuguese text has *Bambar*. It seems likely that the form *Bandhara* was in general use in west Sumatra in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see note 8 above.

<sup>84</sup> In the Kaba Tjindua Mato the Bandahara is said to have responsibility for the coast.

<sup>85</sup> Buo is the reading suggested by Dobbin in *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 67. The "s" Pires places at the end of "Buus" makes Buo an uncertain reading

<sup>86</sup> Cortêsão, *Suma Oriental*, p. 254.

"these", in Cortesão's translation, refers to the last two kings or to all three. Perhaps the ruler at Sungai Tarab acted as *primus inter pares* and reflected the "cosmic unifier" function outlined by de Josselin de Jong and also the "balancing" role of the ruler encountered by the Dutch in the 1660's. Or perhaps the three branches intermarried and contested the succession much as Negeri and Suruaso did in the later seventeenth century.

The available evidence is too vague to allow any clear conclusions about the meaning of Pires' statement, but it does seem that the pattern of relationships which Pires describes is consistent with the type of arrangements which have, traditionally, been used to organize the Minangkabau polity. Threefold divisions, for instance, are common in Minangkabau and these are often complemented, or divided, by dual categories.<sup>87</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, to encounter three kings two of whom had a slightly different status.<sup>88</sup> We also know, from seventeenth century Dutch accounts of the 1674 succession dispute that existing arrangements were fluid and liable to be altered. The situation which Pires described may, therefore, have been an early version of the situation encountered by the VOC in Tanah Datar and of the formal division

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<sup>87</sup> This is a feature which has been noticed by several commentators: see, for instance, Westenank, "Opstellen over Minangkabau I", p. 246 and "Opstellen over Minangkabau II", pp. 240-62; de Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan*, p. 108; and Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, p.64. The *darat* is divided into three *luhak*, or regions, whose inhabitants belong to two *laras*, or *adat* traditions. In the *Undang-Undang Minangkabau* the two ancestors Datuk Katumanggungan and Datuk Perpatih nan Sebatang, who were the progenitors of the *laras*, and a third figure, the king Maharaja Diraja, are portrayed as the key figures in the development of the Minangkabau kingdom. In this case tension existed between the ruler and the two *adat* leaders. A further threefold division appears in the *Undang-Undang Minangkabau* and in royal letters dating from as early as the seventeenth century which depict the first king, Maharaja Diraja, as a descendant of Iskandar Dzulkarnain, and a brother of two other rulers, the kings of China and Rum.

<sup>88</sup> In the *Kaba Tjindua Mato* the Raja Adat and Raja Ibadat are referred to as the Rajas of the two seats, Raja Nan Dua Selo, thus identifying a further two/three division. Three divided by two is persistent in Minangkabau traditions, and categorisation in threes also occurs in *rantau* regions such as Kerinci and Jambi. De Josselin de Jong suggests that this two-three combination is an expression of the totality of the Minangkabau community with the third principle holding together the other two, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan*, p. 108.



between Raja Adat, Raja Ibadat and Raja Alam which is described in the *Kaba Cinduo Mato*, without being an exact mirror of either.

What may have happened is that by the seventeenth century the Raja at Sungai Tarab ("Cunci Teras") had relocated to a place known to the Dutch as "Negeri" (probably synonymous with the names Batu Patah and Pagaruyung) which was close to Suruaso in Tanah Datar. His role, already a little different from that of his co-rulers, may indeed have become less forceful and have developed into the "balancing" function described in VOC sources. The Raja Bamdar/Bandar had taken over Sungai Tarab, he was related to the royal family and by the 1660's his position was known as Bendahara Putih. And, in the eastern part of the *darat*, a ruler known as Raja Muda held court near Buo, just as Raja Bongsu had in Pires' time. The situation inland was likely to have been more fluid than is suggested by the *Kaba Cinduo Mato* and competing claims between different branches of the royal family gave rise to several changes in the organization and distribution of royal titles and position.

The advantage of this reading is that it accounts for the existence of the ruler entitled Paduka Seri Sultan Ahmad Syah in the Tanah Datar area when the Dutch first made contact with the court. It explains the status of Bendahara Putih and his family in the 1660's. And, furthermore, it accommodates the existence of another court and another king, who probably lived in or near Buo and who was approached by the VOC in 1684. It is to this event that we must now turn our attention in order to develop our picture of the royal establishment inland in the late seventeenth century.

### **Pagaruyung and the Eastern Court**

The question of a court situated east of Tanah Datar has already been raised in connection with Pires' description of three Kings of Minangkabau. Gold was mined and

collected not only in central Tanah Datar, in the Selo river valley, but also along the Sinamar and Sumpur rivers. It is therefore logical that members of the royal family might have settled in these regions.<sup>89</sup> The long association between the Minangkabau royal house and the Buo-Kumanis area is reflected in local sources as well as archaeological evidence.<sup>90</sup>

In the *Kaba Cinduo Mato* the Raja Adat is said to have had his seat at Buo, and the Raja Ibadat is situated at Sumpur Kudus.<sup>91</sup> Both of these regions lie to the east of Tanah Datar on the Sinamar and Sumpur rivers respectively. As the crow flies Buo, in particular, is not far from the Tiga Balai area where Suruaso and Sungai Tarab are situated, but on the ground the regions are separated by a range of hills and to travel between them involves a journey down the Selo valley and up the Sinamar past Kumanis [see Map 2].

A major issue in the *Kaba Cinduo Mato* is the relationship between the Raja Alam of Pagaruyung, in Tanah Datar, and the eastern *rantau*. In the text a representative of the Raja Alam in this region is named Raja Mudo and much of the action, in the narrative, takes place when communications between Tanah Datar and the east are severed.<sup>92</sup> Local *Tambo* from the Kumanis region also link this area with the Minangkabau royal family. One relates that the first ruler of Minangkabau,

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<sup>89</sup> This is discussed in Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 60-3.

<sup>90</sup> Most of the catalogued archaeological finds from the Adityawarman period come from central Tanah Datar, but some objects were located in Buo, "Inventaris der Oudheden in de Padangsche Bovenlanden", *OV*, 1912 pp. 47-8. Today members of the royal family still live in Buo and possess *pusaka* of royal dynasty, including copies the stamps which are used to imprint the Minangkabau royal seal on letters and documents. Personal observation.

<sup>91</sup> Van der Toorn, "Tjindoer Mata", p. 7 For an English summary of the text see Taufik Abdullah, "Some notes on the Kaba Tjindua Mato: An Example of Minangkabau Traditional Literature", *Indonesia*, 9 April 1970, pp. 3-9. Other Minangkabau texts place more emphasis on the western regions. The *Undang-Undang Minangkabau*, for instance, concentrates on the development of the Kota Piliang *laras* in western Tanah Datar.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36. Raja Mudo was brother to the queen, Bundo Kanduang, and therefore and uncle to the Raja Alam,

Maharaja Diraja, first approached the interior by way of the Kuantan and Sinamar rivers and settled in the region of Kumanis.<sup>93</sup>

Another tradition from the Kumanis area records how the name Pagaruyung originated. A member of the royal family travelled from Suruaso to Inderagiri and returned by way of the Sungai Karuah to Kumanis. A giant crocodile threatened his settlement and to defend his child he had palms collected from Batu Patah in Tanah Datar where they grew. These were split and the *ruyung* (split palm) was used to build a *pagar* (palisade or fortification) in the river. He thus became known as the Raja of Pagaruyung. Later this branch of the family moved back to Batu Patah and took the name Pagaruyung with them. The Raja's sister remained in the east and became the first Raja Adat. Westenenk concludes that Kumanis was thus once called Pagaruyung.<sup>94</sup>

Evidence that a substantial Minangkabau court probably did exist in on the Sinamar river in the region of Buo and Kumanis in the early 1680s, and that both the name Pagaruyung and the title Raja Muda were in use there, comes from the second major Dutch inspired embassy into the *darat*. In 1684 Thomas Dias, a Melakan Portuguese, travelled inland as an envoy of the Governor of Melaka to meet the ruler of Minangkabau. Dias approached the kingdom from the east coast and his report suggests that the court he visited was situated in the eastern part of the *darat*.

VOC officials stationed at Padang between 1660-80 knew the name of the Minangkabau court as Negeri. Significantly the name "Pagaruyung" does not appear in west coast records until 1686, neither is it used in letters from the court to the west coast before that date. In Melaka, though, the VOC had heard of Pagaruyung. The

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<sup>93</sup> L.C. Westenenk, "Opstellen over Minangkabau", *TBG*, LV (1913) pp. 234-6.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 236-7.

name is used in reports from as early as the 1640s.<sup>95</sup> In 1680, Sultan Ahmad Syah, one of the contestants in the succession dispute wrote to the Governor of Melaka and described himself as King of Minangkabau in the land of Pagaruyung.<sup>96</sup> It could be that "Negeri" was an equivalent for Negeri Pagaruyung which was not understood by the administration at Padang, but the evidence may also indicate that the name Pagaruyung was, at this time, better known in the eastern part of the kingdom.<sup>97</sup> When the Dutch approached the ruler of Minangkabau in 1684, therefore, they already knew of him as the king of Pagaruyung.

Dias approached the *darat* through Patapahan, in the interior of Siak, where the Dato Bendahara regarded himself as possessing a "nobler origin than the Paduka Raja [of Johor] and, moreover, to be holding office on behalf of the Pagar Ruyung ruler".<sup>98</sup> From Patapahan Dias sent envoys inland to the King of Minangkabau. In reply he received a letter from "Jan dipertoan Sultan Sirij Paeda Moeda Marhum

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<sup>95</sup> As we saw in Chapter 2 a Minangkabau ruler living at Inoman, high up the Inderagiri River, wrote to the Dutch using the title Sultan Pagaruyung in 1641.

<sup>96</sup> Pits to Batavia 31 December 1680, Melaka 1681 VOC 1361, ff.49v-50r.

<sup>97</sup> We shall see that it was only after the succession dispute in the 1680s that the name Pagaruyung began to appear in the west Sumatran records of the VOC.

<sup>98</sup> Andaya, *Kingdom of Johor*, p. 133. F. de Haan, "Naar Midden Sumatra in 1684", in *TBG*, XXXIX (1879), pp. 336-7. Dias had already visited Patapahan once in May 1683, but had to return to Melaka to defend himself against a charge of wrong-doing. He was cleared and sent back to Siak, arriving in Patapahan for the second time in May 1684. The expedition took place in the context of Dutch attempts to gain access to tin exported from the interior of Siak. This trade, which developed in the 1670s, was largely controlled by Johor which posted a *Syabandar* at the mouth of the Siak river. De Haan, "Naar Midden Sumatra", pp. 328-331. See also E. Netscher, *De Nederlanders in Djohor en Siak 1602 tot 1865*, Batavia: Bruijning & Wijt, 1870, p. 33. In late 1682 a Raja Hitam led the Minangkabau population in upper Siak in a revolt against Johor. Raja Hitam claimed to be related to the ruler of Minangkabau in Pagaruyung and was acclaimed as ruler over the Minangkabaus of Siak. Andaya, *The Kingdom of Johor*, pp. 131-2 and *Dagh-Register*, vol. 31 II (1682), p. 1463. The Paduka Raja of Johor appealed to the Dutch at Melaka for help before he managed to defeat and kill Raja Hitam. This involvement gave the Dutch an entrée to Siak's trade which they desired since much of Inderagiri's trade was, at that time, diverted to Siak. Macleod, 1905: p. 1604, Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, IV, p. 553. The VOC also hoped that, due to the succession dispute in the interior of Minangkabau, gold from Tanah Datar would be brought eastwards. De Haan, "Naar Midden Sumatra", p. 334.

Macota alam, King in the land of Pagar Oejoeng, lord of the entire land of Manicabo", who, like the other Minangkabau rulers encountered by the VOC, asserted his descent from Alexander the Great.<sup>99</sup> This title, "Sultan Seri Pada Muda", which suggests the young or the junior ruler, is consistent with the evidence already considered concerning the existence of an eastern court.<sup>100</sup>

## The Journey

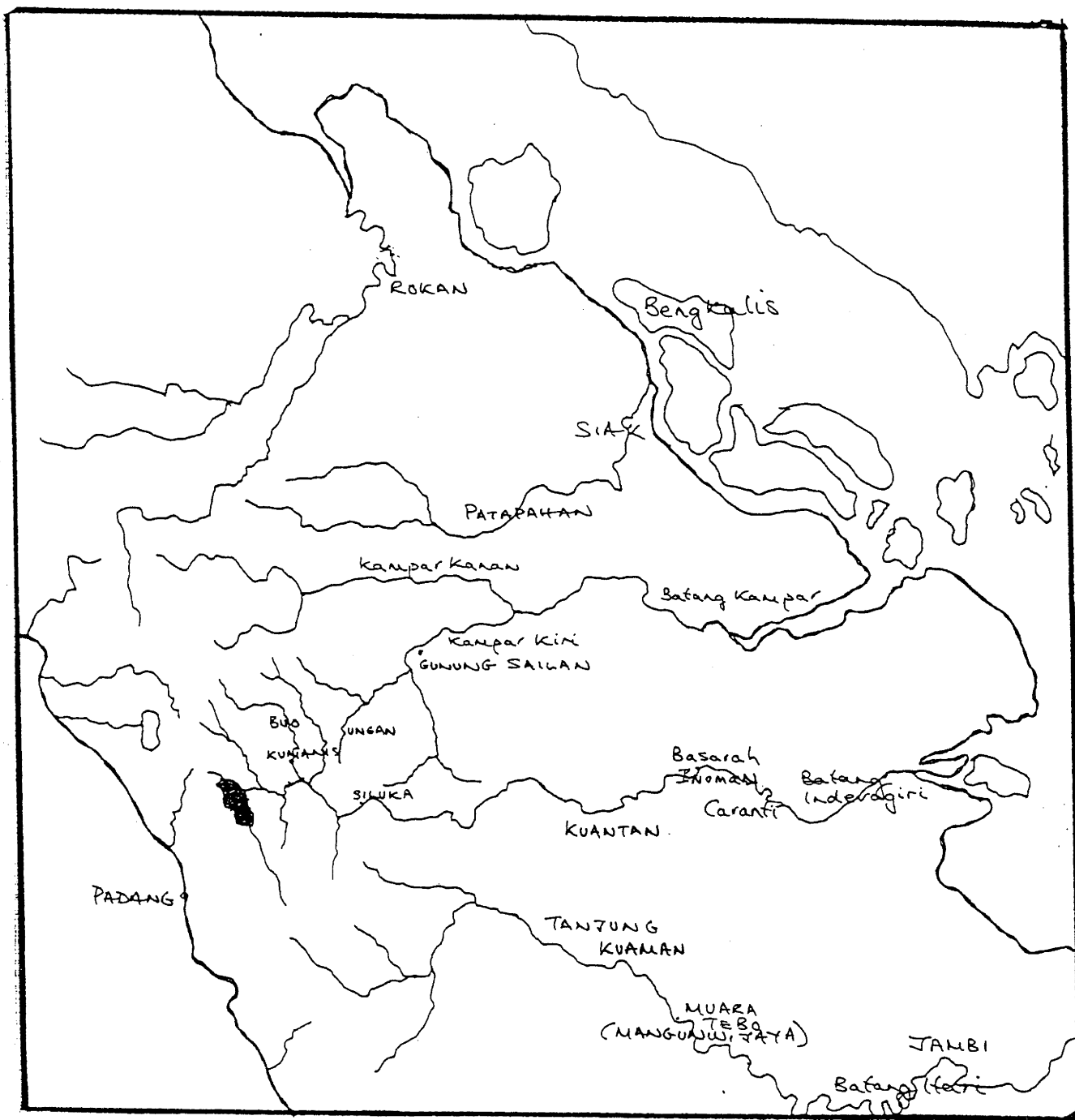
The King's letter encouraged Dias to fulfil his mission and he set off for the interior with a party of Malay escorts. Dias recorded the events of the journey, and his meeting with the King, in a report of some 5,000 words which was included in the *Melaka Dagh-Register* and has been published by F. de Haan.<sup>101</sup> De Haan attempted to trace the route taken by Dias by comparing his description with more modern maps and accounts of the interior. He found it to be largely a plausible journey. The party appears to have approached the interior by moving overland from the Batang Siak to the Kampar Kiri river, and, keeping away from populated centres, they marched inland to the Minangkabau settlements in the Sumpur and Sinamar valleys. The return journey described by Dias is easier to follow on a map than his approach. On their way back the party travelled through the settlements on the Air Tumpuk and the

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<sup>99</sup> Melaka 1685 VOC 1407, f. 5052r. and de Haan, "Naar Midden Sumatra", p. 337.

<sup>100</sup> Pires referred to a "Raja Bonco or Buus" and we have seen that "Bonco" was probably a version of the Malay word "*bongsu*" meaning the youngest. As we have seen the *Kaba Cinduo Mato* also mentions that a representative of the Raja Alam in the eastern *rantau* was known as Raja Mudo.

<sup>101</sup> F. de Haan, "Naar Midden Sumatra in 1684", in *TBG*, XXXIX (1879), pp. 327-366. An English summary of the report may be found in F.M. Schnitger, *Forgotten Kingdoms in Sumatra*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964, pp. 55-64. The archival reference to this report is Melaka 1685 VOC 1403 ff. 379-88. Notes here are to the text published by de Haan which is more generally accessible.



Central East Sumatra

Map 3

Batang Si Bayang until they reached Gunung Sailan on the Kampar Kiri.<sup>102</sup>

On the journey inland Dias and his companions kept away from settlements as far as possible in order that the chiefs of the intermediate regions should not know that they were seeking to make contact with the Minangkabau king.<sup>103</sup> Some of the local communities through which they passed expressed alarm when they heard where the party was heading. At Air Tiris, on the upper reaches of the Kampar Kanan, they were told not to travel to Pagaruyung and that no Christian had ever ventured there. According to Dias the same thing happened in other settlements and at Koto Palang they were refused lodgings when the inhabitants heard that the party was travelling to Pagaruyung. At a place called Pacu, which de Haan thought might be near Gunung Sailan, the party was told that they would not reach their destination alive. These warnings are not explained by Dias, but the court appears to have been considered an inaccessible and fearsome place.<sup>104</sup> Perhaps these sentiments reflect an earlier fear and awe of the *darat* which was encouraged by Minangkabau who were anxious to protect the gold lands.

Eventually the party reached "Nugam" which, according to Dias, was four miles from Pagaruyung.<sup>105</sup> De Haan located a place name, Ngungun, just north of Buo on one of the maps he consulted and he therefore placed the court at Buo.<sup>106</sup> While this is a possible, even a likely, identification, we cannot be certain that the court was

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<sup>102</sup> De Haan, "Naar Midden Sumatra", p. 335 and pp. 357-360.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pp. 339-41.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., pages 358 and 360.

located at Buo.<sup>107</sup> Indeed it may not be possible to locate the court visited by Dias by means of his travel account alone and archaeological research may be necessary to identify the precise location. We can be fairly sure, though of the general area in which the court was located. Apart from "Nugam", which de Haan thought was near Buo, Dias mentions no place names further west than Ungan, Sumpur and Menganti on the Batang Sumpur and Siluka on the Kuantan. Given the hilly nature of the terrain and the time allowed for the expedition it is unlikely that Dias travelled further west than the Sinamar valley. The court was likely to have been situated on the Sinamar river, perhaps at Buo, but it could also have been nearer Kumanis, which is closer to the present-day Siluka.<sup>108</sup>

### The Capital and the King

Dias describes the capital as very populous, though his estimates may be exaggerated.<sup>109</sup> But even with this qualification, his descriptions of the capital and the ceremonial life there, are impressive. He reports that his party was escorted into the town by 4,000 men bearing musical instruments, parasols, muskets and other royal insignia such as gold and silver dishes to carry the letters and gifts which Dias had brought. The instruments were played and guns fired as they progressed to the

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<sup>107</sup> A problem emerges when one examines Dias' account of the return journey. He states that, on leaving the capital the party reached "Luca" in one day. This must have been Siluka on the Kuantan river which Dias also mentions. De Haan argues that in those days it would have been possible to sail down from Buo to Kumanis on the Sinamar and from there to travel on by way of the Ombelin river to Siluka. This is the only way that the party could have reached Siluka from Buo in one day. But Dias makes no mention of a river journey and, moreover, he reported that he was escorted to Siluka by 3,000 soldiers who could hardly all have travelled by boat. *Ibid.*, p. 353 and p. 360.

<sup>108</sup> This is the conclusion which Dobbin reached in *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 68.

<sup>109</sup> This was the view of Andaya, *Kingdom of Johor*, p. 111.



palace.<sup>110</sup> According to Dias he had an initial audience with the King, during which he was offered betel nut and his letter was presented to the ruler. They made polite conversation in which Dias enquired about the King's health, and the ruler complained about the activities of the Paduka Raja of Johor. Dias found it hard to obtain a subsequent audience, a fact which he attributes to the intervention of the nobles who surrounded and protected the king. He was able to make a representation to the queen, however, and through her to secure a further audience with the King.<sup>111</sup>

On the second occasion the ruler received Dias in considerable state, with armed retainers guarding the door. The King is said to have been amazed that Dias knew the proper courtesies for a royal audience and told his nobles that they had misled him in saying that Christians were brutal. In conversation with Dias the King was said to have made two references to written texts. He told Dias that none of the writings of his forefathers mentioned any previous visit by a Christian to the interior. He also told Dias that he would record the details of Dias' visit in his own diary or "gedenck boek".<sup>112</sup> The King is said to have dismissed the full court and conducted a private conversation with Dias in which only three *haji* and a secretary were present.<sup>113</sup> Details of this sort, the bland nature of the first audience, the presence of important nobles who guarded the king, and the granting of a subsequent, private, meeting are very similar to the experiences reported by the envoys who visited Negeri in 1668-9.

The impression of a sacred and protected place, which comes from the

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<sup>110</sup> De Haan, "Naar Midden Sumatra", pp., 342-3.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 344. The report does not indicate whether this was the King's mother or his wife.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p.346.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 347.

frightened response of Malays who learnt of Dias' destination, is reinforced by the size of the armed escort which accompanied Dias when he entered and left the capital. According to Dias it was forbidden for Muslims, by which he presumably meant local Sumatrans, to enter the capital without permission. He recounts that a "Moorish sailor" entered secretly in the guise of a holy man from Mekkah whose aim was to greet the King. The "Moor" told the King that he should not permit Christians in his country, but Dias denounced him as a drunken sailor who had fled from Melaka to Riau because of his debts. On hearing that the "Moor" had drunk wine the King commanded that he be put to death. According to Dias, 3-4000 men jumped to fulfil the King's order.<sup>114</sup>

The King appears to have been keen to enter into a relationship with the Dutch and honoured Dias with the title *Orangkaya Saudagar Raja* (or royal merchant) and gave him certain fine gifts. He also presented him with a written authorisation which, Dias says, granted him the title to Siak, Patapahan and Inderagiri.<sup>115</sup> The letters from the King, which Dias brought back with him, mention the titles and gifts which the ruler bestowed on Dias. In one letter the king mentions that Dias was allowed to live at Patapahan and prosecute the Company's trade with Minangkabaus living there. He was even given permission to punish any Minangkabaus who were hostile to the king's orders.<sup>116</sup> A mandate from the king which accompanied the letters states that, in addition to the title and gifts, "I have also handed over to the aforesaid Thomas Dias three villages in which he may trade at his pleasure." Dias was also granted the right

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 351-2.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>116</sup> Letter from Jan dipertoan Sultan sirij pada moeda marhum macota alam king in Paggeroedjang, lord of the whole land of Manicabo, to the Governor of Melaka 28th Sept 1684, Melaka 1685 VOC 1407 f. 3052r.-3053r.

to punish disobedient subjects of the king in these unidentified places.<sup>117</sup>

When Dias pointed out that Siak was in the hands of Johor, and that Inderagiri had its own king, the ruler replied that both places really belonged to him. He had allowed Johor to trade in Siak, but it did not belong to the king of Johor, he said. The ruler of Inderagiri was his vassal and a rebel. His resentment towards the Paduka Raja of Johor, the ruler said, was because of the Paduka Raja's treatment of his cousin, Raja Itam, by whom he appears to have meant the Raja Hitam who had claimed Minangkabau support when he led the rebellion in Siak in 1682.<sup>118</sup>

In addition to this authorisation and a letter to the Governor at Melaka, the King gave Dias two other papers which have relevance for our understanding of the way in which Minangkabau rulers interacted with their vassals and peripheral courts. Dias describes these papers as two handsome, probably decorated, leaves of paper with the King's seal stamped on them. He calls these "chartes blanches" or "blancas", and states that one was for the use of Dias and the Governor when they wrote to the Minangkabau settlements in Rembau on the peninsula; the other was for use in any circumstances they thought fit. The importance of seals and other authorising signs in Minangkabau statecraft is further demonstrated by the King's request to Dias that he leave behind an imprint of his own signet ring so that any future communication from Dias might be identified.<sup>119</sup>

Although Dias' account has a story-like quality to it, especially in the English version published by Schnitger, much of what he related can be confirmed not only in topographical detail but also by reference to the surviving letters from the King which

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<sup>117</sup> *Ordre van dipertoan Sultan Sirij pada moeda koning binnen 't land Pagaroelang, heer van 't geheele land Manicabo en oock de dorpen van quantan, 28th Sept 1684, Melaka 1685 VOC 1407, f. 3054r.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 348-9.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 350-1.

Dias took back to Melaka. The King's letters mention that Dias visited the court and testify to the titles, gifts and grant of trading rights which the King bestowed on him. In his letter to the Governor at Melaka, the ruler complained that the Paduka Raja had ruined his villages and killed his friend, Raja Itam. The King of Inderagiri had rebelled against him, he said. In the face of these depredations the King asked the Company to assist him and, like Sultan Ahmad Syah of Negeri, he spoke of the black mark of shame before his eyes which he hoped the Dutch would help to wash away.<sup>120</sup> In his letters the King referred to himself as King in "Pagger oejim" and "lord of the whole land of Minangkabau and also the villages of Quantan".<sup>121</sup> He also claimed ownership over Gunung Hijau, the "green mountain", and important symbols of Minangkabau sovereignty such as the "Camat wood" which was divided in three and the loom "Sansita" which operated on its own.<sup>122</sup> There is little doubt that these are genuine letters which, as we shall see, belong to the traditions of Minangkabau royal letter writing.

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How does the identification of an eastern court named Pagaruyung and situated in the Sumpur and Kumanis region help us to understand the internal organization of the Minangkabau kingdom?

The name Pagaruyung has come to be closely associated with Minangkabau kingship. It may be, however, that we cannot, with accuracy, refer to the "rulers of

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<sup>120</sup> "I ask that the Company be pleased to wash away the signs of shame that are before my eyes." Melaka 1685 VOC 1407, f. 3052v.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., f. 3053r. and 3053v.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

Pagaruyung" for every period of Minangkabau history. Suruaso, for instance, appears to be an older name, and one which is mentioned in Adityawarman's inscriptions.<sup>123</sup> Dutch records must be used cautiously as sources for local names and usage, but the VOC reports examined here suggest that the name Pagaruyung may not have been in general use in west Sumatra when the Company first arrived, although it was associated with a court in the Buo-Kumanis region to the east. In the following chapter we shall also see that the name Pagaruyung begins to appear in west coast reports in the late 1680's and comes into more general use in west Sumatra at the end of the century. Moreover this shift, it will emerge, seems to be connected to competition within the royal family.

These changes may be explained by a scenario which has been proposed by both Westenenk and Dobbin. This is the possibility that members of the royal house moved westwards from the Sinamar river to Tanah Datar around the 1680's bringing with them the name Pagaruyung and leaving behind a representative, known as the Raja Muda.<sup>124</sup> Dobbin attributes this move to the stimulation provided by VOC advances towards the court in Tanah Datar. The succession dispute was also probably responsible for a shake-up in the existing institutional arrangements and it may be that the Company's attentions towards the king contributed to the ferocity with which the succession was contested on this occasion.

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<sup>123</sup> Krom, N.J. *Hindoe-Javaansche Gescheidenis*, 's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1931, p. 414; and H. Kern, "Het zoogenaamde rotinschrift van "Batu Beragung" in Menangkabau (1269 en 1297 Çāka)", *TBG*, vol. VI (1917), p. 257. It should not be forgotten that the presence of inscriptions and other monumental remains in key parts of the interior, not just the distribution of gold, would have encouraged members of the royal family to identify themselves with particular locations which were the seats of their ancestors.

<sup>124</sup> This is a slightly adapted interpretation of what Dobbin proposes in *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 66. The move westwards was first suggested by Westenenk, in "Opstellen over Minangkabau", pp. 234-6.

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This has been a lengthy discussion. The new evidence examined, however, here has provided a basis for reassessing some of the most persistent historical problems surrounding the nature of the inland kingdom. It will be helpful, therefore, to conclude the chapter by drawing these strands together.

The two separate embassies inland each encountered an established and ceremonially oriented court in different parts of the interior. It seems unlikely that these courts could have been maintained if the kings were as irrelevant to the Minangkabau polity as nineteenth century Dutch authors assumed. In the case of Sultan Ahmad Syah there is also evidence that, if he so desired, he was in a position to order that gold be taken to the west coast and to stimulate the passage of goods to the coast. Both kings welcomed the VOC and they appear to have viewed the Dutch approach as a means of resisting their traditional opponents, Aceh and Johor [formerly Melaka].

In both cases the Minangkabau nobles were reluctant to allow the envoys access to the king. This may be evidence of an underlying tension between the executive aspirations of the great lords and the type of ceremonial position enjoyed by the rulers. As we have seen, in west Sumatra, the Bendahara Putih acted independently, but he nonetheless acted in the royal name. In focussing so directly on the kings, in the apparent expectation that executive power was part of their position, the VOC may have exacerbated these tensions. As the succession dispute reveals, the choice of ruler mattered to the great lords. The king's position was clearly much more than decorative. And, in the absence of a sovereign, submerged conflicts could dominate the polity and interrupt relations with the coastal regions.

Descriptions of the Minangkabau kingdom have tended to emphasise the

division between three kings. It is not clear, however, that there were three kings of Minangkabau when the Dutch first made contact. Threefold divisions were obviously important in the kingdom, but what is suggested here is that a pattern of dual and tripartite organization was available within Minangkabau culture and that these categories were applied in different ways depending upon circumstances and needs. In Tanah Datar we have clear evidence of a triangular relationship between leaders of the two *adat* traditions and a ruler who held court at Negeri. But there is also evidence, some of which will be reviewed later, that dual kingship was a possible formula for the organization of the kingdom.

The *Kaba Cinduo Mato* and some Minangkabau *Tambo* suggest that there was a neat division of royal courts and functions in Minangkabau history. This does not necessarily seem to have applied in the late seventeenth century if we follow the external, Dutch, sources. It is the general pattern outlined in the *Kaba* which is reflected in seventeenth century conditions, rather than the precise details. The important thing is that the 1670s and 1680s appear to have been a time of change in which adjustments were made to the organization of the kingdom which may, in part, have been prompted by the Dutch presence.

Both of the rulers who received VOC ambassadors in the second part of the seventeenth century sent the envoys home with elaborate letters, titles and other signs intended to authorise the Europeans to act in the king's name. Pits was praised for his good work in "nourishing" the ruler's glory and promoting his great name. The new title and royal emblems with which Pits was presented were intended to help in this task. Dias was also given a title, authority to act and blank credentials from the king which he might use as he saw fit. This approach to royal delegation is similar to the way in which political actors on the west coast were seen to use the royal name in Chapter Four. This tendency towards delegation on the coast and manner in which it

worked may tell more about the nature of Minangkabau authority? To explore this possibility Chapter Six turns, once more, to the coastal world of west Sumatra between 1669-90 and to the developing interaction between VOC officials there and the Minangkabau court.



## CHAPTER SIX

### THE POWER OF WORDS:

#### LETTERS AND DISSENT ON THE WEST COAST 1669-90

This chapter focuses upon the way in which Minangkabau kings communicated with the *rantau*. In Chapter Four we discovered that the king's name had a tangible effect among the west coast population and that the Dutch themselves set out to use that name. We have also seen that delegation was an important theme in Minangkabau political life. Here we shall explore the means by which a ruler inland could proclaim his name in distant coastal regions. Letters, it will emerge, were a vital medium, not just for the communication of royal authority, but also a means by which authority was itself enacted. At the same time VOC reports from west Sumatra between 1669-90 reveal how the Minangkabau royal name began to be used against the Company and how the Dutch merchants responded to this.

The succession dispute inland saw the emergence in the coastal regions of competition between rival claimants to royal authority. As the royal contestants each announced themselves in the *rantau* their messages reached local groups whose opposition to the Dutch regime was intensifying. Minangkabau royal mandates were used to give voice to this discontent and, in some cases, to intercede with the Europeans.

Simultaneously Dutch East India Company officials began to revise their own perceptions. The embassy inland in 1668 marked a high point in Company expectations of the Minangkabau court and thereafter the Dutch became increasingly disillusioned about the usefulness and authority of the king. Minangkabau royal authority was too diffuse to be easily manipulated by the Company in its usual strategy of co-opting and supporting a local king who could act as a front for VOC

activities. As the Dutch began to realise this they formulated a dismissive discourse of powerlessness, which has influenced later assessments of Minangkabau kingship. The role of kingly authority was not so easily explained, however. As eighteenth century Dutchmen were later to admit, the royal family could not be ignored because of their widespread influence with the local people. The VOC's difficulties help us to understand the character of Minangkabau sovereignty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the ambiguous interaction which took place between Dutchmen and locals in west Sumatra.

### Letters and Dissent

A feature of Minangkabau royal influence in the *rantau*, which emerged even before the death of Sultan Ahmad Syah and the ensuing succession dispute, was the focus it provided for local dissidents. In 1669, for instance, there was a renewed outbreak of tension between discontented *panghulu* from Pauh and Kota Tengah and the Company establishment at Padang.<sup>1</sup> The "rebels" were led by *panghulu* who had been ejected from their posts and who resented the position and the influence of the Panglima Raja and his brother.<sup>2</sup> Company officials learnt that these opponents had sent gifts inland to Minangkabau and also to the 10 Bandar. In return they received "mandates" or warrants from the Raja in Suruaso. These warrants ordained that the Pauh *panghulu* and others who had been displaced should be restored to their former

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<sup>1</sup> In 1670 Pits analysed the tension on the west coast as having two main sources, one was the impetus provided by religious opposition to the Dutch and the urge to banish unbelief; the other was the massacre of the Kota Tengah *panghulu* which had been carried out by Verspreet. Pits to Batavia 22nd March 1670, SWK 1671 VOC 1277, f. 1331r. See also Chapter Three on differences between the Dutch and the local inhabitants and economic causes for discontent.

<sup>2</sup> Pits to Batavia 16th June 1669, SWK 1670 VOC 1272, ff. 1046r-1047r. On the tension between Padang and Kota Tengah see *General Missiven* vol. III p. 687 and p. 713

positions.<sup>3</sup> The protest was defused, but Pits and his council sent a small embassy inland to the King carrying the Governor General's reply to his letter and a gift from Padang as well as a letter of complaint about the behaviour of people "like the Raja of Suruaso" who sent mandates in the king's name and disrupted the coast lands.<sup>4</sup>

This is the first hint, in Company reports, of a theme which becomes more evident in later letters, of an alliance between the royal establishment at Suruaso and discontented *panghulu* from the coast. Two years later Sultan Ahmad Syah himself is said to have sent a distinguished embassy on behalf of the Kota Tengah people who had been ejected from their *negeri*. He sent Pits a horse and requested that his subjects should be readmitted to their *negeri*.<sup>5</sup> As Dutch interference in west Sumatra provoked increasing hostility towards the Company, dissidents often made appeal to the ruler. Credentials, warrants and letters sent from one or other member of the royal establishment in the interior carried with them a prestige around which a revolt might focus.

During 1669 Pits' attitude towards the royal house began to harden and his assessment of its usefulness for the Company's purpose of ruling and subduing the peoples of west Sumatra was increasingly disparaging. At the same time he sought to maintain good relations with the king and to keep Batavia informed about the relationship. This was probably because the Directors in Holland had by no means abandoned their conception of a powerful king in the interior. They continued to

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<sup>3</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, ff. 1046r-v.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., f. 1047r.

<sup>5</sup> The arrival of these envoys is not mentioned in any of the surviving letters sent from Pits to Batavia, although the presence of the envoys at Padang is referred to in a letter of the 20th July 1671, SWK 1672 VOC 1283, f. 1644r. The information cited here regarding the arrival of the envoys and the purpose of their visit comes from the more general letters sent by the Governor General to Holland each year. (*Generale Missiven*, vol. III p. 742.) Pits may have mentioned the arrival of the envoys in a letter written between April and June 1671 which has not survived in the records.

encourage a friendly relationship and to urge that a Dutch delegation be sent inland.<sup>6</sup> In September Pits assured his superiors that the troubled coast lands were once more in a reasonably peaceful state, particularly since the Minangkabau king was beginning to "rouse himself". He was said to have been "valiantly" attempting to control "the false letter writers and unrest on this coast".<sup>7</sup> Letter writing was clearly identified as an important element in local opposition and resistance.

### A Priest King

Dutch perceptions of the role and influence of the ruler began to crystallise in this period. In a report to Amsterdam in 1670 the Governor General declared that relations with the Minangkabau king were good, although Company servants did not bother him with the actual government of the regions they ruled in his name. The coast had been disturbed, he reported, but he assured the Directors that the king had very little authority, except among the people closest to his court and even these obeyed him "more out of love than respect (*ontsag*)".<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately we do not have access to the detailed correspondence from West Sumatra upon which these comments were based, but it was in this period that Pits began to characterise the king's authority as priestly.<sup>9</sup> In subsequent letters the ruler is referred to as the

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<sup>6</sup> N. Macleod "De Oost-Indische Compagnie op Sumatra in de 17e eeuw", *Indische Gids*, vol. I (1905), p. 127.

<sup>7</sup> Pits to Batavia, 25th September 1669, SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f. 1063r.

<sup>8</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. III, p. 727.

<sup>9</sup> The general letters (*Generale Missiven*) sent over to Holland from the Governor General were based upon a synthesis of reports from local trading posts in various parts of the archipelago. Two letters from Pits to the Governor General at Batavia, written on 20 November and 16 December, 1669, appear to have been lost in the fourth volume of Batavia's *Inkomend Briefboek* of 1670 which can no longer be located in the Algemeen Rijksarchief. I am grateful to Mrs M. C. J. C. van Hoof, Senior Archivist of the First Section of the Algemeen Rijksarchief in The Hague, for this information.

"priesterlijcken keyser" of Minangkabau and this characterisation was probably first used in a letter from Pits to which we no longer have access.<sup>10</sup>

Pits' "priest king" formulation was an influential one and, given the overwhelmingly protestant ethic of the VOC, it must have helped to lower Company estimations of the Minangkabau kings.<sup>11</sup> In later VOC letters the same Catholic imagery of priests and popes was used to identify ritual features of the Minangkabau ruler's authority. A Calvinistic distaste for display and ritual language was expressed at home in the Netherlands as well as overseas.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the dismissive language of the VOC it would be wrong to assume that the spiritual authority of Minangkabau kings was not an influential factor in what Europeans would term the politics of west Sumatra.<sup>13</sup> Anti-Dutch leaders were also frequently described by VOC servants as "popes" and "priests" and, as we saw, the Suruaso ruler was said to have had an advantage in the succession dispute because he had "given himself to the priesthood". The "love" which VOC servants suggest that

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<sup>10</sup> Pits may also have discussed, in the missing letters, the position and role of four chief ministers of Minangkabau who were also mentioned in a later letter. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, III, p. 742.

<sup>11</sup> The Calvinist orientation of the VOC in this period is discussed in Ricklefs, *War, Culture and Economy in Java*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>12</sup> For a description of the restrictions placed upon Roman Catholics in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century see C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600-1800*, London: Hutchinson and Co., 1977, pp. 123-6; on attitudes towards "Papist idolatry" in the east see p. 140. As Boxer puts it, "'Rather the Turk than the Pope', was the motto of the Protestant Sea-Beggars in 1574, but in the eyes of the pioneer Calvinists in the East Indies there was not much to chose between these two forms of anti-Christ" (p. 142). Boxer draws out the way in which "the derogatory epithets so freely bestowed in Dutch official and private correspondence upon the Roman-Catholics were likewise lavished upon the adherents of Islam". The Dutch Republic was not always as intolerant, however, as anti-Catholic rhetoric would suggest. For a discussion, in English, of religious tolerance in the seventeenth century see, K.H.D. Haley, *The Dutch in the Seventeenth Century*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1972, pp. 84-99.

<sup>13</sup> The practice of politics is taken for granted in modern westerns societies, but this does not mean that the term, and the concept of politics, has always applied in all ages and across cultures. For a discussion of the emergence of politics in Malaysia see A.C. Milner, "Inventing Politics: The Case of Malaysia", *Past and Present*, No. 132 (August 1991), pp. 104-129.

local people felt for Minangkabau rulers was clearly linked with the spiritual power to which Pits alluded when he called Sultan Ahmad Syah a "priesterlijcken keyser". Reverence for Minangkabau kingship, devotion to Islam and opposition to the Dutch were to become even more closely linked in later years and in no sense could this combination be considered powerless.

Pits' attitude towards the inland court was ambivalent. He continued to use the ruler's name when he made and renewed contracts, but he resisted sending a Dutch embassy inland.<sup>14</sup> His remarks concerning high status envoys from the interior were disparaging. He likened them to beggars and looked down on them for buying fish from Company troops. Their promises to stimulate the gold trade did not impress him.<sup>15</sup> In 1671 he responded to the Governor General's suggestion that it would be advisable to send a Dutch delegation inland by declaring that the justification for such a move should be simply to encourage gold traders to come to the coast and not because of any mistaken perceptions about the authority of this "priestly king".<sup>16</sup> No embassy was sent. Pits was clearly unwilling to send Dutchmen inland whatever the Governor General and council wanted. Naturally there is no explanation of this in the Company records, but Pits' developing disdain for the "priestly" king of Minangkabau and his consciousness of the unruly and warlike nature of the interior probably made him reluctant to risk Dutch lives in such an enterprise.

A tension appears in the records, and apparently even in the mind of Pits himself, concerning the nature of royal authority and, most importantly from the

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<sup>14</sup> Pits reported that the Company's relations with the ruler of Minangkabau stood reasonably, but that if the Governor General and council thought it was necessary for a Dutch embassy to visit the interior in order to forge a lasting alliance with the king then he would fulfil their wishes, Pits to Batavia, 4th November 1670, SWK 1671 VOC 1277, f. 2041v.

<sup>15</sup> Pits to Batavia 20th July 1671, SWK 1672 VOC 1283, f. 1644r.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., ff. 1644r-v.

Company perspective, its effectiveness. Pits continued to use the Minangkabau name in his dealings with local people. In 1671 the anti-Dutch resistance at Pariaman gave way and the leading *panghulu* signed a Company contract. They were exhorted to recognise the King of Minangkabau as their "sovereign king".<sup>17</sup> Singkel, too, was brought into the VOC's west coast sphere in March 1672 and signed a similar contract.<sup>18</sup> Admittedly the wording of these contracts followed a formula which had been used since the *stadhoudership* was first initiated. This may have been more than a matter of form, however. In 1672 Pits was still referring to the "borrowed authority" of the Minangkabau king in attempting to settle a dispute between the inhabitants of the 9 Kota and those of the 7 Kota and Ulakan.<sup>19</sup>

The question of the effect or impact of authority is, of course, a real one. In these west coast records authority is largely equated with the use of force. Even Malay voices, talking through their Dutch translators and recorders, exclude the Minangkabau king from a certain type of *macht* or power. The ruler, himself, as we saw, is said to have described the Dutch as *grooter* and *machtiger* than himself and identified the Company's use of force and its trading prowess as evidence of this difference.<sup>20</sup> This theme is also reflected in a Malay letter from the Minangkabau court dating from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. The letter refers to the "people of the Company whose government on the west coast garrisons of Pulau

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<sup>17</sup> J.E. Heeres (ed.) *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, vol. 2 (1650-1675) BKI 87 (1931), p. 444.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 460-1.

<sup>19</sup> Pits to Batavia 18th March 1672, SWK 1673 VOC 1290, f. 588v.

<sup>20</sup> See p. 109 above.

Andelas is harsh".<sup>21</sup>

### Royal Letters: Two Minangkabau Kings Announce Themselves

Yet Minangkabau kings were not without an authoritative impact upon local societies although in Dutch eyes this was often a subversive impact. In 1674 the *Dagh-Register* records that an envoy was sent from Johor to seek the help of the "Keizer" of Minangkabau against Jambi, which indicates that the king was considered to have influence.<sup>22</sup> Company sources also record that in 1676 a new Minangkabau king was recognised in Rembau and Sungai Ujung on the Malay Peninsula. He came from east Sumatra and was reputed to be full of "holiness, miracles and magic".<sup>23</sup> In the following year in west Sumatra, just as Pits was about to conclude a settlement with Pauh and Kota Tengah the good will which had been built up was dissolved, Pits said, when a Nakhoda Raja came from the east bringing a letter from an unidentified "Minangkabau Keizer" who called for an uprising against the Dutch on the west coast. Pits thought that this was likely to be the same "thrown up" king who had established himself in Melaka and had won support among the "superstitious Muslims" there by means of his "devilish sorcery".<sup>24</sup>

According to Pits, "popes" or "priests" (*papen*) who instigated rebellion among the commonality were not unusual on the west coast. These outbursts often took the

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<sup>21</sup> E. Dulaurier, *Chrestomathie Malaye. Lettres et Pieces Diplomatiques ecrites en Malay*, Paris: L'Institut de France, 1845, pp. 47-61. The word used for garrison here is an Arabic term, *mahrās[ayn]* - from *mahrūsa*. I am grateful to Dr A. Street for his help in identifying this word.

<sup>22</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 22 (1674), p. 101.

<sup>23</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 25 (1677), p. 213 and "Report of Governor Balthasar Bort on Malacca 1678", translated by M. J. Bremner with an introduction by C.O. Blagden, *JMBRAS*, vol. V pt. 1 (August 1927), pp. 69-71.

<sup>24</sup> Pits to Batavia 1st August 1677, SWK 1678 VOC 1328, ff. 391v-392r.



form of attacks on the Panglima Raja for his irreligious association with the Dutch. Inspired by "popes", Pits wrote, the people became deaf to all reason. They "took up weapons against their commanders and chiefs and raged among themselves in a call for holy war".<sup>25</sup> They sought to drive the Dutch away and restore government by Muslims. Such "bestial vomit", Pits wrote, came forth on a daily basis.<sup>26</sup>

These rebellions and claims to authority, many of which were based on descent from the Minangkabau royal house, were probably linked, at least in part, with the royal succession dispute which followed the death of the "Keizer" Sultan Ahmad Syah in 1674. Numerous letters and deputations from Minangkabau are mentioned in Dutch sources after Ahmad Syah's death. Reference, for instance, has already been made to a Minangkabau king who was recognized as ruler in Rembau and Sungai Ujung in 1676, and an unidentified Minangkabau king who called for a revolt against the Dutch on the west coast in the following year. In 1676 the *Dagh-Register* recorded that Minangkabau royal envoys had also arrived at Palembang, but received little recognition from the Malays living there and so turned again for home.<sup>27</sup> Other deputations followed, some of which appear to have originated from the nephew's family at "Negeri" while others can be linked with Yang Dipertuan Inderma at Suruaso. It seems that in this period two candidates were announcing themselves in the coastal regions and the medium they used was a vital one in Minangkabau political life - the dissemination of royal letters.

These letters appeared in the *rantau* regions more or less simultaneously, but it will be useful to examine the type of messages issued by each of the candidates. Sultan Ahmad Syah was the title adopted by one of the old king's nephews who announced to

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., f. 392r.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., ff. 391-2.

<sup>27</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 24 (1676), p.129.

the Padang administration in 1680 that he had succeeded to the title and established himself at "Nagui".<sup>28</sup> The previous year, however, Ahmad Syah had already sent a letter to the Governor General at Batavia which was carried via Jambi rather than Padang. The Dutch were suspicious of this letter because it by-passed Padang, but they do not appear to have considered the possibility that Sultan Ahmad Syah was activating the division of the kingdom which Pits had reported in 1677. According to that formula the nephew's branch were to govern the eastern regions, while Inderma Syah was responsible for the west coast.<sup>29</sup> The VOC response to Ahmad Syah's letter highlights the cultural distance which separated seventeenth century Dutchmen from the Minangkabau court and the difficulties which the Dutch experienced in comprehending the language of Minangkabau kingship. It also discloses, briefly, the existence of an alternative discourse of authority to that of the Europeans and a political world which the Dutch had not penetrated.

The letter proclaimed Ahmad Syah as ruler over the whole kingdom of Minangkabau. He was said to have been raised to this elevated position by God who had commanded that all his subjects uphold Islam by maintaining the dignity and honour of the kingdom. The king was associated with the foundation of the Minangkabau kingdom, and with his dynasty's descent from Bukit Seguntang which, in most Minangkabau letters, is placed in Pulau Langkapuri, between Palembang and Jambi.<sup>30</sup> This reference to the famous place of origin of Malay kingship which, in

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<sup>28</sup> Hurdt to Batavia 29 February 1680, SWK 1681 VOC 1359, f.757r.

<sup>29</sup> Ahmad Syah's letter actually mentions that the envoys were to travel through the Batang Hari region in upper Jambi, an area which was closely linked with the Minangkabau kingdom. *Dagh-Register*, vol. 27 (1679), p. 33.

<sup>30</sup> According to the letter, almighty God had prophesied that "this king would come into the world and that he would rule over Pulau Langkapuri and God also created him king on Bukit Sigertang Mahamirou; from that hill he came down to the mountain of Sigentang Panggiringan which lies above Palembang". A Dutch translation of this letter appears in the *Dagh-Register*, vol. 27 (1679), pp. 31-3. Nineteenth century Malay letters from Pagaruyung, as well as others

different forms, appears in the genealogies of the most important Malay kingdoms, seems to have been misinterpreted by the Batavia administration. They thought the letter came from a presumptuous "upstart" who ruled a small kingdom between Jambi and Palembang. In particular, the Governor General and council were put out by the request, contained in the letter, for the payment of an annual sum which, it was claimed, had been promised by the Dutch "Panglima Cahaya Raja" at Padang.<sup>31</sup> The envoys were delayed in Batavia while enquiries were made of the Padang administration as to what this meant.

Hurdt, who was then commander at Padang, may have associated Ahmad Syah with the Minangkabau king who disrupted Pits' negotiations with Pauh and Kota Tengah in 1677. He replied in June 1679 that the letter must be from a "greedy and self-inflated" person named Sultan Califatullah (God's Deputy) who thought that, in ruling a small territory between Palembang and Jambi, he had "jurisdiction over the whole world".<sup>32</sup> In both cases the Dutch misunderstood the local language of authority used in the letters. In claiming descent from Bukit Seguntang Ahmad Syah was indeed claiming an association with the foundation of the whole Malay world. They also failed to realise that the name Ahmad Syah was the regnal name of one branch of the Minangkabau royal family.<sup>33</sup> The administration did not appreciate that the ruler they were dismissing was probably one of the nephews of their own dead "Keizer of

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sent to the Dutch in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, locate Pulau Langkapuri thus: "Maka diturunkan Allah ta'ala tanah daratan yang bernama Pulau Langkapuri antara Palembang dengan Jambi akan tempat raja yang asal anak Sultan Hidayat Allah ta'ala", extract from a manuscript transcribed in Dulaurier, *Chrestomathie Malaye*, pp. 47-61. This subject is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., and *Dagh-Register*, vol. 28 (1680), p. 716 for reference to this annual "somba" (or *sembah*).

<sup>32</sup> Hurdt to Batavia 3 June 1679, SWK 1680 VOC 1348 f.1006v.

<sup>33</sup> Andaya, *Kingdom of Johor*, p. 330.

Minangkabau" who was announcing his status in a potent language of names and titles which belonged to an established local discourse of authority.<sup>34</sup>

In the letter to Batavia Sultan Ahmad Syah proclaimed himself as a ruler ordained by God. He demanded tribute, which all Minangkabau kings expected from the Dutch following the *stadhouder* arrangement, and the reluctance of his envoys to return via Padang may be attributable to their instructions, contained in the letter, and to the unsympathetic reaction of officials at Padang who were confused and irritated by the succession dispute. The envoys appear to have been humiliated in Batavia and were sent back without a reply, which, from a local perspective, must have been an insulting breach of etiquette.<sup>35</sup>

Sultan Ahmad Syah was, nevertheless, persistent in his attempts to win Dutch recognition. In February of the following year he sent his envoys to Padang to announce his succession. He declared that he wanted to reinstate the old "contract" which his predecessor had made with the Dutch and to reactivate the *stadhoudership*. He also asked that his subjects should be allowed to trade on the Javanese coast and that he should receive the "old dues" which he claimed the king had been paid in the time of the Acehnese.<sup>36</sup> The Dutch did not know what to make of these demands. Van Leene reported that the letter contained little but "honour titles". The only "real" thing it contained, in his view, was the information that Ahmad Syah had succeeded his

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<sup>34</sup> Ahmad Syah's letter to Padang, announcing himself as the dead king's nephew, did not arrive until the following year. Nevertheless, the position held by one of the envoys sent to Batavia was, in fact, already known to the Dutch, if not the individual. Khatib Seri Negeri was an important Minangkabau official who was encountered during the 1669 embassy inland. This fact should have alerted the Regeering to the importance of the deputation and its link with the Minangkabau court. SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f. 1031r., also SWK 1669 VOC 1268, f. 848r.

<sup>35</sup> See Barbara Watson Andaya's comments upon the etiquette associated with the proper receipt of a letter in *The Abode of Grace*, pp. 81-3.

<sup>36</sup> Hurd to Batavia 29 February 1680, SWK 1681 VOC 1359, f.757r. See also Macleod, "De Oost-Indische Compagnie", p. 137.

uncle at "Nagui". He advised Batavia that Ahmad Syah probably had little power, but that it was not yet clear what harm he could do to them.<sup>37</sup>

Ahmad Syah was assertive in his demands and he was clearly not prepared simply to fit in with Dutch plans. He wrote to Melaka, at the end of 1680, a letter in which he described himself as King of Minangkabau in the land of Pagaruyung.<sup>38</sup> The letter claimed that Ahmad Syah was descended from Alexander the Great, and it contains numerous references to items of Minangkabau royal regalia. Pits, who was by then Governor at Melaka, sent a respectful reply in which he greeted the king as ruler over the land of "Pagger Oejoeng".<sup>39</sup>

This is the last identifiable letter which came from Sultan Ahmad Syah as a candidate in the Minangkabau succession dispute. It is tempting to speculate, however, that this Sultan Ahmad Syah may have been one and the same as the famous Minangkabau leader Ahmad Syah ibn Iskandar who emerged near Palembang in 1685 with five ships and a force of two hundred men, to lead a widespread anti-Dutch campaign.<sup>40</sup> In alliance with other local princes, Ahmad Syah ibn Iskandar, also known in Dutch sources as Yang Dipertuan Raja Sakti, undertook a crusade of

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> As we have seen, at this point the name Pagaruyung had not been used in any west coast reports from Company officials. Its use in this context may indicate that "Nagui/Negeri" was an equivalent for Negeri Pagaruyung which had not been understood by the administration at Padang.

<sup>39</sup> Pits to Batavia 31 December 1680, Melaka 1681 VOC 1361, ff.49v-50r.

<sup>40</sup> The report of this sighting, which describes him as the "Minangkabau Raja Yang Dipertuan", says that he had been involved in discussions with the new king of Palembang, Pangeran Aria, Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. IV, pp. 757-8. Early in 1680 an unidentified Minangkabau king sent a letter to the Sultan of Banten which was taken via Palembang. It offered to assist the Sultan of Banten with seventy well-manned vessels if he should come to blows with the Dutch and to oppose them on the west coast of Sumatra. *Dagh-Register*, vol. 28, (April 1680), p. 145. This letter may well have been sent from Ahmad Syah after his rejections by both Batavia and Padang.

opposition against the Dutch which had the character of a virtual holy war.<sup>41</sup> Ahmad Syah ibn Iskandar claimed to be ruler of the Kingdom of Minangkabau and this claim was accepted by his supporters and brother princes, although historians have been cautious about linking him with any of the known contenders in the Minangkabau succession dispute. Ahmad Syah ibn Iskandar's royal credentials were regarded with suspicion by the Dutch, but the timing of his emergence in Sumatran political history suggests that his claim should be considered seriously and that he may indeed have been a legitimate contestant in the Minangkabau succession dispute whose rejection by the Dutch encouraged his later antagonism.

Between 1685-1695 Ahmad Syah ibn Iskandar circulated numerous elaborate and spiritually potent letters in which he announced his descent from the ruling house of Minangkabau and from Iskandar Zulkarnain (Alexander the Great). These letters place Ahmad Syah ibn Iskandar in the same tradition of Minangkabau letter writing to which Sultan Ahmad Syah belonged. Ahmad Syah ibn Iskandar's letters will be considered in more detail below.

While Ahmad Syah was sending his letters to the Dutch and others between 1676 and 1680 communications from the Suruaso candidate appear to have been more directly related to the political situation on the west coast. In August 1680 a royal letter was sent to Padang from the "Koning van Serrewassa" who called himself "Keyzer van Maningcabouw".<sup>42</sup> The Padang *panghulu* noticed something odd about the characters used in the letter, and the wording and seal were unfamiliar which

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<sup>41</sup> Ahmad Syah ibn Iskandar's career is discussed in detail in J. Kathirithamby-Wells, "Ahmad Shah ibn Iskandar and the late 17th Century 'Holy War' in Indonesia", *JMBRAS*, vol. xliii, 1 (July 1970), pp. 48-63.

<sup>42</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol 28, (1680), p. 721. The title used in the text of the letter was actually "Seri Sultan Ahmad Syah" which raises the possibility that the letter may have come from the "Negeri" branch with which that title was associated. There are other reasons, however, for believing that the letter indeed came from Suruaso.

made them suspicious.<sup>43</sup> However this was the first communication which the Dutch had received from Suruaso, which may account for the differences they noticed in the format and style of presentation.<sup>44</sup>

The text of the letter stated that the king had heard of the unrest in the coastal lands and requested that the region be restored to him. He would regard this as a "sign of love". He also asked that the Company erect trading posts on the river at Ujung Karang, at Pariaman, and at Tiku, Pasaman and Barus, in order to prevent open war from breaking out. This king informed the Padang administration that previous emissaries had failed to carry out his instructions properly. He was therefore sending the present letter with Paduka Seri Tuan who was a man after his own "eyes and heart".<sup>45</sup> He urged a conclusion to the war between Raja Putih of Kota Tengah and the Panglima Raja.<sup>46</sup>

As the King of Suruaso's letter suggested, the west coast was in considerable turmoil in 1680-1. Other local chiefs had become involved in the battle which Pauh

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<sup>43</sup> In Padang the letter was viewed in the context of the administration's current understanding of the succession dispute, which was that the *regenten* of Sungai Tarab and Batipu had refused to accept one of the royal aspirants as their king. *Dagh-Register*. vol. 28, (1680), p. 722.

<sup>44</sup> In 1690 a letter came from Sultan Inderma Syah of Suruaso with a red lacquer seal attached, SWK 1691 VOC 1485, f. 524v. Later VOC reports refer to the "Suruaso seal" as though it were different from that of Negeri, SWK 1692 VOC 1498, f. 506. The Negeri seal was black with white lettering, SWK 1268 VOC 1268, f. 847.

<sup>45</sup> The letter was not accompanied by *menteri* from the court in the usual way. Instead it was said to have been handed over to a Paduka Tuan in Sintu and Lubuk Alang by a Yang Dipertuan Baginda Maharaja di Raja. This title is not particularly useful in identifying the source of the letter. A later letter from Sultan Inderma at Suruaso names a Baginda Maharaja as that king's brother, but Maharaja Diraja was also, we have seen, a title assumed by the nephew of the old ruler in "Negeri", SWK 1684 VOC 1386, f.1013, and p. 117 above.

<sup>46</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 28 (1680), p. 721. In view of their uncertainty, the Dutch sent a very cautious reply inland. They said that both the seal and the form of the letter were unusual and they had therefore been unsure about the origin of the letter. If it turned out, however, that the letter really had come from the rightful successor of the old ruler, then the administration apologised for not receiving it with the necessary ceremony, pp. 722-3.

and Kota Tengah were fighting against the Panglima Raja.<sup>47</sup> The widespread nature of this developing resistance to the Dutch presence in west Sumatra and elsewhere is increasingly evident in scattered references in the archives. In the same years a representative of the Sultan of Banten was said to have incited rebellion at Bungus, south of Padang, and to have offered local people the Sultan's help against Padang and the Company.<sup>48</sup>

Dutch reports of relations with the interior are too confused to allow a neat categorization of all the various communications sent out from "Negeri" and Suruaso in this period. A link does appear to have existed, however, between the Suruaso branch of the royal house and the "rebel" leaders of Kota Tengah, Pauh, Pariaman and Duabelas Kota. In a report from Pariaman in January 1679, Frans. Backer noted that a letter from the "Lima Kaum and Duabelas Cotas" in the hills, which was sent to Pariaman, had been written with the foreknowledge of the "Maningcabousen Conninck".<sup>49</sup> Backer's report does not specify which king was involved but it later emerged that this was the Raja Inderma at Suruaso. After a Dutch force was sent to Pariaman in mid-1679 the cowed "rebel" *panghulu* there blamed the revolt on a leader called Simutulang who, they claimed, had dominated them and forced them to renounce their contract with the Company and swear subservience to Raja Inderma.

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<sup>47</sup> These included the *panghulu* of Pariaman, Bayang, Tarusan, Bungus and Duabelas Kota. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, IV, p. 385-6. Among the opposition leaders identified by VOC servants were the Kota Tengah *panghulu*, Raja Putih, Sultan Becopia of the Duabelas Kota Hilir, and Raja Ibrahim of Pariaman. These are said to have blamed the Panglima Raja for the expulsion of the Acehnese and the establishment of the Company on the west coast. Ibid., p. 386 and also p. 112. These *panghulu* may thus belong to the category, identified by Rueb, of Bodi Caniago chiefs who had profited during the Acehnese period and who were displaced by the Dutch alliance with some Koto Piliang groups.

<sup>48</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, IV, p. 387. This may well have been related to an unidentified royal letter sent to the Sultan of Banten in 1680. See note 40 above.

<sup>49</sup> Rapport gedaen van de ondercoopman Frans. Backer 26 January 1679, SWK 1680 VOC 1348, f. 986v.



He had described the Dutch as the King's enemies.<sup>50</sup>

This link between the Suruaso prince and the rebel *panghulu* is consistent with the concern, expressed in the 1680 letter from the "Koning van Serrewassa", with trading conditions at Pariaman, Tiku and other ports whose commerce had been destroyed by the Dutch monopoly at Padang. Moreover, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, rebel *panghulu* from Pauh and Kota Tengah had already, in 1669, received mandates in support of their struggle from the Raja in Suruaso. "Bevel brieven", or letters of command, sent from Suruaso were also, as we saw in Chapter Five, mentioned in the *Dagh-Register* in 1680 and a number of these "false" letters were said to have come into the Company's hands.<sup>51</sup> The Raja of Suruaso, then, involved himself with these disenfranchised west coast *panghulu* not only by issuing them with letters or mandates of support, but also by writing directly to the VOC on their behalf.

There are several points to be considered here. One of the myths of Minangkabau political history, fostered by the reports of Company servants, is that Minangkabau rulers had nothing to do with practical matters. Yet most of the royal letters and deputations discussed here were concerned with unrest on the coast and with the trading rights of Minangkabau subjects. Over and above the "passive" prestige and authority enjoyed by Minangkabau kings, members of the royal family were also able to defend and articulate the concerns of local subjects who were unhappy with their political and economic status. Was this a new development and to what extent was it effected by the Dutch presence in coastal Sumatra?

Two historians have commented that the late seventeenth century was a period of resurgence and, as Andaya put it, strengthening and "increased self-confidence" for

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<sup>50</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 28, (1680), p. 712.

<sup>51</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 28 (1680), p. 716.

the Minangkabau royal family.<sup>52</sup> As is often the case in earlier Southeast Asian history, it is difficult to judge change without accurate knowledge of what went before. The Dutch had only been present in west Sumatra for about twenty years, and without access to earlier sources, we know little about the Minangkabau kingdom in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless the Dutch appeal to the royal family in the 1660s, and the opportunities apparently offered to them by respectful and subservient letters such as that of Pits in 1668, must have been a new departure, at least in so far as the Company offered a new arena and context for Minangkabau royal rhetoric.

The arrival of the Dutch and the manner in which they attempted to manipulate Minangkabau royal prestige may have influenced the role of the royal family in protests such as the one at Pariaman. The VOC attempted to quell protest by using the name of the Minangkabau royal house. It would not be surprising, then, if their local opponents fought fire with fire by enrolling the same symbol on their own side. Given the emphasis which the Company had placed upon its alliance with the royal house their opponents may have felt that royal support would strengthen their case in Dutch eyes as well as in those of the local chiefs whom they wished to enrol. It is possible, in other words, that the Dutch had themselves advertised the name of the king in a way which made it a more potent weapon against their own position.

The succession dispute caused considerable disruption and conflict in the interior and in Dutch eyes it had the potential to trigger protest in the coastal regions

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<sup>52</sup> Andaya, *Kingdom of Johor*, p. 329. Dobbin describes this period as a "heyday" for the Minangkabau royal family. *Islamic Revivalism*. p. 66.

<sup>53</sup> Acehnese control over the west Sumatran coast from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century must surely have affected the position and the role of the royal family to some extent, but gold still flowed out of the west coast ports in this period, and in the early sixteenth century Pires had depicted the royal family as controlling access to the source of gold, the mines. Similarly the "love" with which, according to the Dutch, the west coast population regarded the royal family may not have been seriously affected by the Acehnese presence.

which were also affected economically by the slowing of the gold trade. The extent to which the Dutch were themselves to blame for the energy with which the succession was contested is impossible to judge with assurance. Nevertheless the several appeals made by Ahmad Syah, in particular, for Dutch recognition and payment suggest that the VOC was responsible for giving the prestige and relevance of the position of "king" a particular edge in this period. The respectful letters sent inland by successive Company commanders may well have encouraged the energetic contestation of the royal succession.

If Dutch advances helped to stimulate the activity of the Minangkabau court in this period, the effect was not what the VOC had intended and Company officials began to be increasingly exasperated with the ruler. Given initial Dutch expectations of a powerful local intermediary, and their contradictory requirement for a passive, yet prestigious, local patron, it is not surprising that they were to be disappointed on both counts. The involvement of the major chiefs and princes of the interior in the succession dispute between 1674 and 1683 meant that the royal family was barely involved in what the VOC perceived as the "real" business of the west coast in these years.

### **A "Bare Name"**

The disruption of the gold trade, increased opposition towards the Company and the fact that the VOC had managed without the patronage of the king since 1674, all appear to have convinced Company servants of the ruler's inability to fulfil the role the Dutch had imagined for them. In 1682, when rumours were circulating that the two contending princes would send envoys to the coast to renew the alliance with the Company, van Leene described the stadhouder arrangement as a "pretext". In truth,

he wrote, the King's overlordship and the commander's position as royal panglima was a fiction, "a bare name and appearance, without deed or actuality".<sup>54</sup>

In 1683, van Leene reported that envoys from the "priesterlijcken coninck van Mangcabou van Sirwasso" brought a letter which contained "no more than recommendations for the good government and prosperity of the coast lands".<sup>55</sup> In the letter the king is said to have laid claim to his title as ruler over the lower lands and of the whole of Sumatra. Van Leene dismissed this claim as having no basis in any new commission or in evidence of his present mastery.<sup>56</sup> It was not manifest in deeds, he wrote, but only in name since "they were satisfied with a bare title".<sup>57</sup>

Early in the following year van Leene reported what appears to have been a second letter from Yang Dipertuan Inderma in which he requested an annual payment from the Dutch.<sup>58</sup> These yearly payments are mentioned in letters from the royal family over a long period and while no reference to a guaranteed sum has been uncovered in the Dutch sources, this expectation on the part of the royal family may have originated in their tribute arrangements with the west coast *negeri* before the advent of the VOC.

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<sup>54</sup> Van Leene to Batavia 26 December 1682, SWK 1683 VOC 1377, f. 1074r. "...ende is niet anders als een blooten naam ende schijn, sonder daad, of sijn ende eenlijk een pretext ende voorwerstel..."

<sup>55</sup> Van Leene to Batavia, 3rd March 1683, SWK 1684 VOC 1386, f. 1009r-v.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., "Maar niet uijt eenigh neuwe opdraght, af pratentie van prasente heerschappije".

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. "Die niet in der daat[d] maar alleen in naam zijn hun met dien blooten titul vergenaegende." This claim to sovereignty over the whole island was probably part of the long introduction containing titles and lists of regalia which were almost always omitted in the copies of Malay letters sent from Padang to Batavia. In the part of this letter which has reached us, the king refers to the Dutch Panglima Cahaya Raja and the Panglima Raja as his "*stedehouders*" in the coastal regions from Singkel to Calowen. The letter was delivered to Padang by Maharaja Laksamana who was to become a regular envoy from the Suruaso court and by the king's cousin Baginda Maharaja. Ibid., f. 1013r.

<sup>58</sup> Van Leene to Batavia, 18th January 1685, SWK 1685 VOC 1403, f. 3069v. No such request was mentioned in the 1683 letter.

Notwithstanding his support for the rebel *panghulu* on the coast, these embassies and letters from Sultan Inderma Syah of Suruaso marked the beginning of a period of regular communication between the Suruaso court and the Dutch administration at Padang. No more letters came from Sultan Ahmad Syah, but it is not clear that the succession issue inland was entirely settled.<sup>59</sup> In August 1684 van Leene complained that the gold trade was still very slow because the Minangkabau inland were at war with each other.<sup>60</sup> The Dutch administration was waiting for a single ruler to emerge. This expectation, which is voiced several times in Dutch reports of the period, continued to affect their perception of events.<sup>61</sup> In particular, it coloured their attitude to the claims of those they saw as "fabricators", "falsifiers" and "imposters". But, as competing claims to Minangkabau royal prestige multiplied in the late seventeenth century, the original Dutch conception of a single ruler in Minangkabau became increasingly inappropriate.

### "Noxious Agitators"

In 1685-6 an anti-Dutch uprising took place in the southern region of 10 Bandar (Sepuluh Buah Bandar or Ten Ports) which alarmed the VOC and encouraged its representatives to acknowledge Inderma Syah as successor to the old king. This

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<sup>59</sup> Leonard Andaya has judged that the succession dispute was concluded in 1683 when Inderma Syah came into direct contact with the Dutch. As he says, "This accession ended all hostilities, and the two cousins at Pagar Ruyong and Suruasso ruled jointly as Yamtuan Sakti and continued to keep the succession within their two families through close marriage alliances." Andaya, *The Kingdom of Johor*, p. 330.

<sup>60</sup> The Panglima Raja made this displeasure known inland which resulted in the Laksamana coming to Padang to talk with the administration. Van Leene to Batavia 1st August 1684, SWK 1685 VOC 1403, f. 421r-v.

<sup>61</sup> See, for instance, Van Leene to Batavia, 3rd March 1683, SWK 1684 VOC 1386, f. 1009r-v.

rebellion illustrates the way in which Minangkabau kingship acted as a catalyst and vehicle for local resistance and the part which royal letters and credentials played in this. It also demonstrates the extent to which Europeans, while pursuing their real power concerns in west Sumatra, also became entangled in a local world in which words, names and titles had a potent and uncontrollable impact.

The 10 Bandar region had been involved in the general opposition towards the VOC during the early 1680s and the arrival of English East India Company representatives there in 1684-5 offered local people a commercial alternative and a means of expressing their opposition to the Dutch. In 1684-5 the VOC's long time "ally" the Sultan of Inderapura was tempted to admit English merchants to his kingdom.<sup>62</sup> Sultan Muhammad Syah's defection, as the Dutch saw it, is explained in later VOC accounts in terms of the English willingness to assist him with men and ammunition in his quest to subdue Menjuto.<sup>63</sup> The Sultan also complained that Van Leene, the former Commander of the west coast, had often affronted him and had neglected his proper entitlements. Significantly the Sultan appears to have referred his discontent with the Dutch to the Minangkabau court. Dutch letters mention that in 1685 the Raja of Priaman Parah in the 10 Bandar was sent up to the Minangkabau capital by Sultan Muhammad Syah.<sup>64</sup> There he complained that the "Hollanders" had destroyed the coastal regions. The king is said to have sent four of his *panghulu* and

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<sup>62</sup> H. Dodwell (ed.) *Records of Fort St. George: Letters to Fort St. George*, vol. 3 (1684-5), p. 86 and pp. 103-4. A brief discussion of early English contacts with the west coast of Sumatra and the sources which are available on this topic can be found in Appendix Three.

<sup>63</sup> See J. Kathirithamby-Wells, "The Inderapura Sultanate: The Foundations of its rise and decline from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries", *Indonesia*, vol. 21, (1976), pp. 71-81.

<sup>64</sup> SWK 1686 VOC 1415, f. 651 r. Also spelt "Piaman". This region was also known as Amping Para and the raja was a member of the Empat Suku, the four ruling families in the Sepuluh Buah Bandar and Sungai Paguh region. Kroeskamp, *De Westkust en Minangkabau*, p. 75 n.3.

fifty followers back to the coast with Raja Priaman Parah.<sup>65</sup>

This complaint prompted a response from other members of the royal family, and Company servants blamed Raja Priaman Parah for instigating a revolt in the coastal regions which focussed around two "rebel" princes from the Minangkabau court.<sup>66</sup> These princes were first mentioned in May 1686 when the Minangkabau ambassador, Maharaja Laksamana, arrived at Padang with an assertive letter from Sultan Inderma Syah who described himself as a descendant of Iskandar Zulkarnain, son of the old King and above all other kings in rank. He recognized the Dutch Commander as his deputy and asked for two years' worth of tribute.<sup>67</sup> Maharaja Laksamana informed the Commander, Jacobus Couper, that two of the King's cousins had travelled to the coast and had gone to 10 Bandar, where they were claiming authority over the people.<sup>68</sup> These two brothers were acting without the King's authorization, Maharaja Laksamana said. They had asked the ruler for licence to visit the interior of Jambi, not the west coast. The credential which the king had given them was not intended for use in the 10 Bandar.<sup>69</sup>

The administration encouraged Maharaja Laksamana to travel south in order to

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., f. 686r. and Padang to Batavia, 29 September 1685, SWK 1686 VOC 1415, f. 651r. and f. 686r. In 1667 a son of the Raja of Priaman Parah was said to have been involved in a plot against the Company which had involved Raja Putih, and this may be the same individual. Kroeskamp, *De Westkust en Minangkabau*, p. 128.

<sup>66</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, Vol. V, p. 135.

<sup>67</sup> Jacobus Couper at Padang to Batavia 10th October 1686, SWK 1687 VOC 1428, f. 502r. and Letter from the Keizer of Minangkabau to Padang, 4th May 1686, SWK 1687 VOC 1428, f. 562v..

<sup>68</sup> Raja Priaman Parah wrote to van Mechelen in Salido early in 1686 to inform the Company that he had been to Minangkabau and stayed only a short time. He had been followed back, he said, by two Minangkabau kings who had been accepted in the area. The Raja seems to have been hedging his bets in making the Company aware of these developments and also asking for money, SWK 1687 VOC 1428, f. 492. The names of the two princes were said to be "Gingam and Lieka now entitled Rajas Mamassa and Mokesa", SWK 1687 VOC 1428, f. 502v.

<sup>69</sup> Padang to Batavia 10th October 1686, SWK 1687 VOC 1428, f. 502v.

assess whether these "firebrands" (*roervincken*) could be removed. There it emerged that the two brothers had amassed a considerable following.<sup>70</sup> It was reported that:

all the inhabitants of the 10 Bandar had abandoned their old kings to follow these newcomers,

whom they acknowledged as rulers.

The old kings were forced from the old customs and were obliged to eat on the ground from banana leaves, like the common folk.<sup>71</sup>

In 1687 VOC servants reported that the brothers were regarded with "awe and veneration" by the people who treated them "like Gods".<sup>72</sup>

The brothers defied the Company and refused to meet with Maharaja Laksamana's deputation. Instead they demanded, via envoys, that they be recognised as kings and as rulers over the 10 Bandar.<sup>73</sup> In VOC records these two brothers are usually referred to as the "Radjas Dua Chelas". This name is difficult to interpret. It appears to be the name given to the rajas by the Dutch and perhaps the Minangkabau court. According to Wilkinson "*chelas*" means to "take liberties" or "to make oneself at home". The term Raja Dua Celas may, therefore, refer to the two rajas as imposters. The other possibility is that the word *selo* was intended. At least one Company report refers to "beide de radjas sela" and *Sela* or *Selo* is a word with known political implications in Minangkabau. *Selo* is a term for "seat, territory or geographic

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., ff. 502v-503r. A letter from the Raja of Lakitan accompanied van Mechelen's report sent from Pulau Cinko on the 20th April 1686. In this letter Raja Lakitan informed the Company that the chiefs of the 10 Bandar, who had recently renewed their contract with the VOC, had now abandoned that pledge and were ready to follow the two Minangkabau Kings who had arrived with Raja Priaman Parah, Ibid, ff. 491v-492r.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., f. 504r.

<sup>72</sup> SWK 1688 VOC 1437, f.433v-r. The Dutch blamed this on the Raja Priaman Para, who, they claimed, had given the Rajas a "great name" and treated them with honour.

<sup>73</sup> Padang to Batavia 10th October 1686, SWK 1687 VOC 1428, ff. 503r.



division".<sup>74</sup> The traditional three rulers of Minangkabau are known as the Raja Tigo Selo (rulers of the three seats) and the term Raja Dua Selo also occurs in the *Kaba Cinduo Mato* to describe two of the three rulers inland.<sup>75</sup> The name Raja Dua Selo would imply, therefore, that Sultan Inderma Syah's two cousins laid claim to positions of power inland. This suggestion would be more convincing if the two rajas used the name themselves, but there is no evidence of this. In what follows, therefore, they are referred to as the Raja Dua Celas.

A later Dutch report identified the Raja Dua Celas as rajas from "minor *negeri*" in the region of Lima Kaum. As in earlier VOC letters, Lima Kaum is described here as a prominent part of the Minangkabau realm which, with its associated negeri, formed a counterbalance within the kingdom against the district of Sungai Tarab.<sup>76</sup> The Raja Dua Celas set themselves up in opposition to Sultan Inderma Syah of Suruaso and there are indications that this was not unrelated to the royal succession dispute. The rajas were described as Inderma Syah's cousins which would be consistent with their being nephews of the old king.

Moreover, and significantly, the Raja Dua Celas claimed precedence for another court in the interior, the court at Pagaruyung. And here the name Pagaruyung is mentioned for the first time in west coast records. This may suggest that Westenenk, and later Dobbin, are correct in assuming that members of the Minangkabau court

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<sup>74</sup> According to Wilkinson "*chelas*" means to "take liberties" or "to make oneself at home", but this is not easy to reconcile with the full name of Dua Chelas. The term "*sela*" instead of "*chelas*" is used in SWK 1688 VOC 1437, f. 563v. For a definition of "*sela*" or "*selo*" see J.L. van der Toorn, *Minangkabausche-Maleisch Nederlandsch Woordenboek*, 's Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981 and R.J. Wilkinson, *Malay-English Dictionary*, London, Macmillan, 1959. 2 vols.

<sup>75</sup> See p. 130, n.88 above.

<sup>76</sup> SWK 1688 VOC 1437, f. 432v. The information that the Raja Dua Celas came from Lima Kaum might suggest that they were involved in representing members of the *laras* Bodi Caniago. As we saw in Chapter Three, P. D. Rueb has suggested that Bodi Caniago groups were prominent in anti-Dutch protest because of their displacement from the existing trade networks.

might have moved from the Buo area westwards in the 1680's and may have brought the name Pagaruyung with them at this time. Whether or not earlier references to "Negeri" were a corruption of Negeri Pagaruyung, by 1686 Negeri and Pagaruyung appear to have meant the same thing and signified the royal centre which stood alongside, and in the 1680's in opposition to, Suruaso.

The rajas sent a letter to the VOC post at Pulau Cinko in which they declared themselves, it seems, to be emanations of Minangkabau kingly authority. A necessarily opaque rendering of their letter, translated from the seventeenth century Dutch translation, reads as follows:

This is the command of Raja Pagaruyung and Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain to the oppercoopman and commander. Since the earth has existed and the firmament has been suspended, no king has come down to the north west coast. Now his highness has come down. If you acknowledge the king and lord of Minangkabau as rightful ruler; then sincerely this is a manifestation [*najamat*] of the king who is most elevated, bringing orders from his majesty, other than which no one should accept, because these are the agents of his majesty, [who] gives a sign of sincerity which we offer before the feet of his majesty's steadfast senior merchant and commander."<sup>77</sup>

This use of the titles Raja Pagaruyung and Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain does not appear to have meant much to the Dutch at first, but it was, apparently, meaningful to the local population. When the Minangkabau envoy Maharaja Laksamana was told about the letter he denounced the two rajas as "false disseminators and thieves of the name of the Raja Minangkabau".<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> SWK 1687 VOC 1482, f. 565v. "Translated Malay letter to the 10 Bandar from the Minangkabau envoys, called Raja Pagaruyung and his highness Sultan Iskandar: Dis ist bevel vande radja Pagar Roejang en Zulthan Iscandaer Zulcornijn aenden oppercoopman en commandeur. Zoo lange de aerde gestaen en 't firmament gehangen heeft zoo en isser nooijt vorst aende noortwest stranden afgecomen - nu is zijn hoogheit afgekomen. Indien ghij den koninck en heere van Minangkabou oprechtelijck voor vorst erkent, indien opregtelijck dese is den Koninck njamat die op 't hoogste verheff, ende bevelens brengt van zijn majesteijt buiten wien niemant moet geloof gegeven werden, want dese zijn de vertrouwde van zijn majesteijt geeft nu een teken van oprechtigheit op dat wij die op offeren voorde voeten van zijn majesteijt bestendig oppercoopman en commandeur." *Indien* has been translated here in the sense given by Verdam, *Middel-Nederlandsch Handwoordenboek* - "in that case".

<sup>78</sup> Couperus to Panglima Raja, 10th May 1686, SWK 1687 VOC 1428, f. 576v.

In another letter which the Raja Dua Celas sent to the local *panghulu* of Menjuto, the rajas identified themselves as Yang Dipertuan Muhammad Syah and Iskandar Zulkarnain.<sup>79</sup> They claimed to be "famed and honoured in all of Arabia and Persia"; to be "possessors of the highest glory and all the holiness in this world, like the emperors of Turkey and China". The letter states that these rajas

rule over all the lands of Minangkabau and live in Negeri Pagaruyung, which is the capital of Minangkabau, from where we have now come to Sungai Paguh bringing orders for the four *suku* and our other subjects in the 10 Bandar.<sup>80</sup>

We only have access to these letters in Dutch translation, but it is clear that they employed many of the titles and phrases, the rhetorical figures, which belonged to the vocabulary of Minangkabau royal letter writing between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>81</sup>

In addition the Raja Dua Celas made appeal to divine sanction and to an intimate relationship with God of a kind which we have already encountered in the letters of other Minangkabau kings. The letter to Menjuto accuses the Dutch of destroying the coastal regions and commands all the subjects of the two rulers to await their orders. The letter warns that any who fail to obey will be considered to have been cast out from the community of the Prophet and to be accursed by God and by the rajas themselves who are descended from Bukit Seguntang.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> This letter appears to have been captured by the Dutch and to have arrived in Batavia among other papers from the west coast.

<sup>80</sup> Van Mechelen to Batavia, 12th October 1686, SWK 1687 VOC 1428, ff. 589r-590v. In Minangkabau royal letters and seals the region of Sungai Paguh is often mentioned as a peripheral part of the ruler's sphere to which his royal radiance spreads and from whence it flows to the coastal region of 10 Bandar. The four *suku* were the governing body of Sungai Paguh with authority over the 10 Bandar.

<sup>81</sup> This subject is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 590v-591r.

## A Battle of the Signs: Words in Contest

To the Dutch, the Raja Dua Celas were "noxious agitators and disturbers of the common peace".<sup>83</sup> And, if it were not for the disturbance they caused, their claims to these "bare titles" would not have seemed important to Company servants. For a modern European reader, too, the resonant language of kingship used by the two rajas may appear to be "mere" rhetoric. In west Sumatra, however, the force and power of these titles and claims appear to have been very real. Sultan Inderma Syah, for instance, engaged immediately in a battle of words with the Raja Dua Celas. His reaction suggests that their appearance was probably part of tussle within the interior which was linked to the succession dispute. In a letter sent to Padang in 1686 he denounced the Raja Dua Celas and warned the Company about these other Minangkabaus who came down "deceitfully" from the highlands to the coast lands. He also asserted his own position stating that God had chosen him as the ruler to represent the family of Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain in that era. Maharaja Laksamana, he wrote, was his ordained envoy and the only one who was entrusted to bring the ruler's orders (*bevel*) to the west coast.<sup>84</sup>

In 1687 the Sultan sent a further elaborate royal letter, the royal titles and preamble of which were, as usual, omitted by the VOC's scribes.<sup>85</sup> The letter states that it is an order or commission (*gebod*) from the king and it reasserts the role of

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<sup>83</sup> "Schadelijcke oproermaackers en turbateurs van de gemeene ruste". SWK 1688 VOC 1437, f. 432v. "Turbateurs" is defined in J. Verdam, *Middelnederlandsch Handwoordenboek*, 's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981.

<sup>84</sup> Dutch translation of a Malay letter from Sultan Inderma Syah brought to Padang by Maharaja Laksamana on the 6th August 1686, SWK 1687 VOC 1428, f. 569. A similar point is made in another letter from the king which was received in Padang on the 17th November 1686, SWK 1688 VOC 1437, f. 584v.

<sup>85</sup> The omission is marked in this instance by the phrase "naa tijtel" at the beginning of the Dutch translation of the letter.

Maharaja Laksamana as royal messenger and intermediary. Only the Company was entrusted with the right to use the king's name in west Sumatra and to rule on his behalf. The king expressed his confidence that the Company would rule wisely in his place and would bring any rebels, such as the Raja Dua Celas, who disobey his royal orders to a state of obedience. The ruler also asserted the divine power which lay behind his own authority. The letter states

These are also God's orders which have been conveyed to us by his angels. Through his merciful favour in the al-Qur'an it is His Truth that I should be king here on earth in God's stead.<sup>86</sup>

The Sultan had good reason to encourage the Dutch in their attempt to reassert his authority in the coastal regions. In 1686 his envoy to the 10 Bandar, Khatib Sidi Makhudum, was stopped, arrested, fined and mocked by the people in the kampungs of the Company's enemies Rajas Betua, Aetche, and Besar.<sup>87</sup> And, in 1687, a nephew of the king, Sultan Abdul Jalil, was said to be travelling through the coastal regions without the Sultan's permission.<sup>88</sup> The Dutch, in turn, suggested that the Sultan should keep his family members from travelling in the coastal regions and offered the return of the rebels Raja Dua Celas.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, in 1686 a letter was sent to Padang from a Minangkabau king, Raja Hisam [Hitam] who is not clearly identifiable with any previous royal correspondent. The text of this letter was, in fact, a copy of the letter sent to Pits by Sultan Ahmad Syah in 1668 in which the king instructed his subjects to

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., f. 535r. "...met aenbiddinge aen ons en den gouden generaal want alsoo zijn die geboden godts, door sijne engelen ons aengecondigt, door sijne genade gunst inde alcoran 't is zijn waarheijt dat ick soude zijn konninck hier op aerden in steede van Godt.."

<sup>87</sup> SWK 1688 VOC 1437, f. 549r.

<sup>88</sup> SWK 1688 VOC 1437, f. 592r. On the basis of an earlier VOC letter Macleod described this highland lord as an envoy of the king. The records show, however, that the VOC later discovered he had come to the west coast on his own account, without the king's permission. Macleod, "De Oost-Indische Compagnie", vol. 1 (1906), p. 793.

<sup>89</sup> Padang to Minangkabau 18th March 1687, SWK 1688 VOC 1437, f. 535.

praise his name in their prayers.<sup>90</sup> A variety of attempts were being made, therefore, to lay claim to Minangkabau recognition. The appearance of a copy of this old letter nearly twenty years after its initial composition suggests that such letters may have been kept in the interior and that they were considered to be a very significant part of Minangkabau political life. We can see how powerful letters were considered to be from the king's instruction to the Dutch, conveyed by Maharaja Laksamana, that they should burn any letters captured from false representatives of the king.<sup>91</sup>

In the context of a discussion of royal power and powerlessness in Sumatra these challenges and counter claims to authority are illuminating. The Dutch appear to have been right in judging that Sultan Inderma Syah could not control the envoys and letters issuing from the interior. In the context created by anti-Dutch feeling in west Sumatra, the language of authority, not the individuals, seemed to convey authority. It was the language of kingship, the words and names inscribed and broadcast in royal letters and credentials from the interior which had the power to unite and represent the disenfranchised and impoverished sections of west coast society.

In the face of this flow of words the VOC turned to Sultan Inderma Syah. If Company servants in Padang were in doubt before 1686 about who the legitimate king of Minangkabau might be, the events of that year drove them firmly into the arms of this ruler. This became a matter of urgency when the Raja Dua Celas made contact with a rival European power and, as kings of Minangkabau, they ceded the region of Batang Kapas to an English East India Company representative.

Ralph Ord, the English representative at Inderapura appears to have first come

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<sup>90</sup> SWK 1687 VOC 1428, ff.562v. -563r. The message of the letter, which was stamped with a seal "named bil'ilahi", was a bid for royal recognition and the restoration of relations with the Dutch. The expression *Al-wathiq bi'ilahi* ("The Truster in God") was often used on seals. Wilkinson *Malay-English Dictionary*, pt. 1, p. 140.

<sup>91</sup> SWK 1687 VOC 1428, f.569v.

into contact with Minangkabau envoys in October 1685. On the 19th he responded to a request for his presence in Bengkulu by notifying his subordinates there that he was unable to leave Inderapura because the Emperor of Minangkabau had just arrived. As Ord puts it "...having advised the Emperor of Manacau that he [Ord] would come to those countries himself and settle them, the Emperor is already arrived in expectation of him..<sup>92</sup> This remark is difficult to interpret with any confidence, but it seems clear that Ord met at least an envoy from Minangkabau. Ord was dead by May 1686 but his successor, Samuel Potts, became involved in a connection with the Raja Dua Celas which may have been engineered by the Sultan of Inderapura.<sup>93</sup> Potts' letters and papers were captured by the VOC at Batangkapas<sup>94</sup> in the 10 Bandar and we are, therefore, dependent upon Dutch records for an account of his relations with the Raja Dua Celas.<sup>95</sup>

From a VOC perspective English merchants began making illegal inroads into Dutch trade in the 10 Bandar by paying too much for pepper in Silibar and thereby damaging Dutch trade. In March 1686 the English Company established a post at Panggasan in the south of the 10 Bandar region, but north of the Dutch post at Air

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<sup>92</sup> Sumatra Factory Records, vol. 1 (1685). This letter has been published in P.Wink, "Eenige achiefstukken betreffende de vestiging van de Engelsche factorij te Benkoelen in 1685", *TBG*, vol. LXIV (1924), pp. 479-81 and in J. Bastin, *The British in West Sumatra 1685-1825*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1965, pp. 19-20.

<sup>93</sup> Sultan Muhammad Syah of Inderapura's loyalties became apparent in 1687 when he refused to renounce his association with the English and asserted that he was following the orders of his family, the Rajas of Minangkabau in Negeri Pagaruyung. Sultan of Inderapura to Padang, SWK 1688 VOC 1437, f. 504. Macleod associates this statement with the visit to Inderapura of Sultan Abdul Jalil, mentioned above note 88. Macleod, "De Oost-Indische Compagnie", vol. 1 (1906), p. 793.

<sup>94</sup> Sometimes spelled Batang Kapas or, in VOC records, "batang cappas".

<sup>95</sup> The relationship between the Raja Dua Celas and the English Company has received little attention in published accounts of West Sumatra during the seventeenth century. In particular it has not been mentioned by any historians working on EIC records. This is probably due to the absence of specific details about the Minangkabau rajas with whom the English were involved and the fact that English papers relating to the Raja Dua Celas were captured by the VOC at Batangkapas. SWK 1687 VOC 1428, f. 589r.

Haji. Then, on the 23rd July, Potts established an EIC trading post at Batangkapas, in the centre of the 10 Bandar. Potts was granted the land at Batangkapas by the "two Minangkabau deceivers", the Rajas Dua Celas.<sup>96</sup> The infuriated Dutch sent a deputation south to try and persuade the local chiefs to abandon their allegiance to the Raja Dua Celas and the English. In a counter protest Potts wrote to van Mechelen asserting that the King of England and his representatives in the EIC had taken possession of Bengkulu, Menjuto, Inderapura and the 10 Bandar with the permission of the King of Minangkabau.<sup>97</sup> According to Dutch reports Potts fully accepted the claims of the Raja Dua Celas to be rightful successors to the Minangkabau Emperor<sup>98</sup> and, one report stated that the Raja Dua Celas had handed over to the English the orders, *bevelens* (probably letters of credentials) which they had brought down from Minangkabau.<sup>99</sup> The Dutch deemed this to be a great outrage. The threatening nature of these events, as far as the Dutch were concerned, is illustrated in the comment of one Dutchman that the great reputation of the Raja Dua Celas spread well beyond the 10 Bandar to the rest of the west coast.<sup>100</sup>

In the VOC reports concerning this competition between English and Dutch merchants we find described an incident which highlights and symbolises the cultural ambiguities of European participation in a local world of meaning. Europeans found themselves involved in a battle of signs as they fought to defend their own "rights" in west Sumatra and used local emblems of authority for this purpose. Jacob Couper described to his superiors how the VOC Ensign Peter Bovie was sent to Batangkapas

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<sup>96</sup> SWK 1687 VOC 1428, f.508r., ff.512v.-513r., and f.578.

<sup>97</sup> This is described in Macleod, "De Oost-Indische Compagnie", vol. 1 (1906), pp. 782-4.

<sup>98</sup> SWK 1687 VOC 1428, f. 524v. and f.525v.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., f. 578.

<sup>100</sup> SWK 687 VOC 1428, f. 515r.



to protest against the English presence there. The Dutch came armed with a letter from Sultan Inderma Syah and what is described as a "tijken", or sign, probably a *tanda* or royal seal, carried by the Minangkabau envoy Khatib Sidi Makhudum. This *tanda* was exhibited before the Englishman, Potts, who responded by brandishing his own written authorisation (*opdracht*) stamped with the seal of the Raja Dua Celas. This was a green and gold seal which the Dutch declared to be unfamiliar and unauthentic since, in their experience, the rulers of Minangkabau always used black seals with white lettering.<sup>101</sup>

The tension of this showdown and confrontation between the rival *tanda* (sign) appears to have been too much for its local participants. According to the report, followers of the Rajas Dua Celas attempted to grab the Minangkabau royal credential from the hands of the Khatib Sidi Makhudum. They were strenuously resisted by the locals in the VOC deputation. The Europeans stood above this moment of stress. Bovie complained, but Potts gave him no help and told the Dutchmen to let the locals settle their own disputes!<sup>102</sup>

Several contests were involved in this incident and, as always, our view is a partial one. We see rivalry in a longstanding dispute over the royal succession in Minangkabau. We can also see a contest concerning the conventions and authority of a type of sign, or *tanda*, which appears to have had a central role in the transmission and proclamation of Minangkabau sovereignty in Sumatra. Further, in this battle of symbols, the records offer us a fascinating insight into the way that two European representatives brandished local emblems of power which, in other circumstances, they would each have dismissed as meaningless trifles. Apparently Minangkabau royal credentials had a currency and a relevance in the coastal regions which could not be

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., f. 524r.

<sup>102</sup> Padang to Batavia 10th October 1686, SWK 1687 VOC 1428, ff. 525 and 528r..

ignored.

In the face of this European competition VOC officials based their claims to trading privileges in west Sumatra squarely upon their *stadhouder* relationship with the Minangkabau royal family. Despite Dutch scepticism concerning the authority of the Minangkabau royal family, and the increasing disillusionment which VOC officials had experienced during the succession dispute, the Dutch responded to this rebellion in the south by asserting the legitimate authority of the Minangkabau "keizer". When Maharaja Laksamana returned inland to inform his master of events, the Dutch sent a letter encouraging the King to recall the two brothers by sending an order so that all the inhabitants of the west coast will become aware of "his majesty's power and his righteous anger over this disturbance of the general peace".<sup>103</sup> In a letter to Maharaja Laksamana the Company recommended that the king should use force to remind his two cousins and the population of the west coast who the true king was.<sup>104</sup>

Ultimately local resistance to the Dutch began to cave in and several local leaders deserted the English side. Finally, in August, the Dutch used their superior military strength to overcome the English fort.<sup>105</sup> The Dutch were now able to persuade Potts that he had been deceived by the Raja Dua Celas and, in the face of Dutch force, many of the local rulers who had allied with the English denounced them and claimed to have remained loyal to the VOC. The Raja Dua Celas were taken to Pulau Cinko with Khatib Sidi from where they were eventually returned to the court

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., f.505v. A brief reference to these events is made in Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. 5, pp. 51-2.

<sup>104</sup> Jacobus Couper to Maharaja Laksamana 8th August 1686, SWK 1687 VOC 1428, f. 578r..

<sup>105</sup> They took care not to harm its English occupants with whom the Dutch were officially at peace.

on orders from Batavia.<sup>106</sup>

Sultan Inderma Syah's response to the return of the two rebel rajas indicates the subtle nature of relations between different branches of the royal family. Batavia ordered that the rajas should be returned inland rather than punished with exile in order to maintain friendly relations with the Minangkabau kingdom. The Padang officials were anxious that the rebels should receive some form of punishment and they were puzzled by Sultan Inderma Syah's response to a letter the VOC sent inland suggesting the return of the Raja Dua Celas. The Dutch found the ruler's letter so ambiguous that, in an unusual step, part of the Malay was actually transcribed within the official report sent to Batavia. The ruler expressed a concern that the return of the two rajas would lead to uproar within the Alam Minangkabau and he used the Malay term *hiru-biru* which implies tumult and anarchy.<sup>107</sup>

These were justified. In 1690, after the rajas had been returned inland<sup>108</sup>, the VOC at Padang received a letter from the court informing them that the Raja Dua Celas had been discovered in a plot to burn the royal capital and had been taken prisoner. They became the slaves of Sultan Inderma Syah.<sup>109</sup> The fact that the Raja

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<sup>106</sup> Potts was returned to Inderapura. Later EIC letters make it clear that he had acted without consulting his superiors and that the affair was considered to be a disaster by EIC officials.

<sup>107</sup> SWK 1688 VOC 1437, f. 614r. The Malay passage transcribed within the Dutch letter reads as follows: "Comedien darrij itou tita cami capada commandeur Panglima Sijaja Radja dan Panglima Radja prikal [perihal?] mengatakan radja radja Janter dan Capaleth Company barang dibichiaracan saboleth boleh dibitchiara oleh Commandeur Panglima Tsjaja Radja, serta Panglima Radja sepaja jangan hari-biru dalam alam minangkaboe."

<sup>108</sup> Maharaja Laksamana had travelled to the coast with two *regenten* from Lima Kaum and he assured the VOC that the ruler's wish was that the Raja Dua Celas should be returned to the highlands. Perhaps it was intended that the chiefs from Lima Kaum would take charge of the Raja Dua Celas since this was the region they originally came from.

<sup>109</sup> Padang to Batavia 2nd May 1690, SWK 1691 VOC 1485, f. 421. This was a practice of the Minangkabau royal house mentioned in other sources. For a modern reference to this practice see De Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan*, p. 110.

Dua Celas were accommodated within the interior, and were not exiled or put to death, probably reflects the delicate balance between different branches of the royal family and regions within the interior.

### **The Word vs. Deed Paradigm in Seventeenth Century Dutch Discourse**

Competition with English merchants led VOC representatives to cleave to Sultan Inderma Syah and recognise him as the legitimate representative of Minangkabau sovereignty. They encouraged him to assert his "royal power" and, in turn, Sultan Inderma Syah wrote to the Padang administration in a lordly voice and emphasised his position as the royal descendant of Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain and as God's representative on earth. The affirmation of bonds between Padang and Sultan Inderma Syah of Suruaso was also expressed in VOC assertions, made to the English, of Dutch rights in west Sumatra which were derived from their association with the "Keizer" of Minangkabau. This prerogative was asserted in the VOC's use of "authentic" royal credentials and seals which might discredit those used by the Minangkabau rajas who sponsored the English establishments at Batangkapas and Inderapura. In their use of these emblems of royal authority Company servants participated in a local discourse of power in which royal letters and credentials played a crucial role. The irony of Dutch participation in this local discourse, however, is that it was just at the moment when they were obliged to use the royal name of the Minangkabau ruler to its utmost, in order to secure their "real power", that VOC servants were formulating their most disparaging assessments of royal authority.

These assessments were focused around the possibility of a Dutch embassy inland to the royal court, an undertaking which, we have seen, Batavia had been urging for some time. The reluctance of the Padang administration to contemplate this

was in part based upon perceptions of the danger which Europeans might encounter by travelling inland, but it was also articulated in Company correspondence in terms of the insignificance of the Minangkabau royal family in Sumatran political life. Jacob Lobs wrote from Pulau Cinko in 1688 to say that an embassy to the Minangkabau capital had

by general and unanimous consent been judged to be useless because that Emperor was acknowledged to be no more than titular without being in the least involved with the hillmen or with the gold trade.<sup>110</sup>

Lobs also suggested that none of "our people" should be permitted to travel to the highlands lest they cause "unbelievable commotion and consternation" among the hill dwellers.<sup>111</sup>

In 1690 Solomon Le Sage and the council at Padang wrote to Batavia in a similar vein. It would be too dangerous, they wrote, to travel through some of the inland *negeri*. People in these *negeri* had still not seen white men. In any case, the authority of the king, they suggested, was in decline. His status "rests more upon his name than in deeds". His usefulness to the Company was really only as a "cloak" for their activities and to make the VOC presence "more palatable to the quarrelsome locals". The appearance of a Dutch deputation might even shame the king, it was suggested, because his residence was "no better than that of the ordinary Malays, being thatched with *atap*".<sup>112</sup>

Seventeenth century Dutchmen, then, continued to draw a distinction between authority held "in name" and authority exercised in deeds or "in fact". In this distinction we can detect an echo of Van Leene's assertion, in 1683, that the

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<sup>110</sup> Report by Jacob Lobs at Pulau Cinko written on the 2nd September 1688, SWK 1689 VOC 1453, f. 550.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. He refers to the example of the hill merchant Muller, who was involved in the Company's gold trade and who had apparently run into trouble of this nature.

<sup>112</sup> Solomon Le Sage and Raad to Batavia 8th January 1690, SWK 1690 VOC 1462, f. 463r.

Minangkabau ruler's position was apparent only in name and not in deeds since "they were satisfied with a bare title".<sup>113</sup> Yet, in 1687, during the English challenge in Batangkapas it was precisely *in name* that the ruler of Minangkabau was so useful to the VOC. Not only that, but it was by disseminating that name illegally that the Raja Dua Celas were thought to be so dangerous. As VOC servants sometimes unconsciously acknowledged, the name of the ruler did have an important impact in seventeenth century west Sumatra. Verspreet admitted as much in 1667 when he reported that

We have been consolidated in that quality all around, thus we have begun so completely to establish ourselves with the king's seal and under that name that all obstacles to reaching our goal have vanished.<sup>114</sup>

The persistent opposition between words and deeds, or between titles and reality, in the records examined here represents a paradigm in the discourse of VOC officials. It points us to an underlying distaste with rhetoric in seventeenth century Dutch ideas. J.H. Huizinga, the great historian of Dutch civilization, has remarked upon a "relative insensibility to myth and rhetoric" in Dutch thought.<sup>115</sup> This aversion to figurative language and embellishment was linked to an epistemology which was based upon a belief in observable reality. The Netherlands emerged from the long battle with Spain imbued with homely, or bourgeois, values in which material objects had a central place.<sup>116</sup> Seventeenth century Dutchmen, according to Huizinga,

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<sup>113</sup> Van Leene to Batavia, 3rd March 1683, SWK 1684 VOC 1386, ff. 1009r-v and above p.\*. Van Leene also commented in 1682 that the King's overlordship and the commander's position as royal panglima was a fiction, a "bare name and appearance without deed". Van Leene to Batavia 26 December 1682, SWK 1683 VOC 1377, f. 1074r.

<sup>114</sup> SWK 1668 VOC 1264, f. 288r. Also cited in Chapter Four above.

<sup>115</sup> "Spirit of the Netherlands", in J.H. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilization in the Seventeenth Century and other Essays*, London: Fontana and Collins, 1968., pp. 114-5.

<sup>116</sup> In the absence of a strong nobility and church establishment, Huizinga points out, merchants were the most significant group in seventeenth century Dutch society.

had a strong feeling for reality, in so much as philosophically or otherwise, objects were deemed to exist in their own right and valued as such."<sup>117</sup>

According to Huizinga the Dutch were realists in that they "were convinced of the substantiality of things" as they "appeared to the senses".<sup>118</sup>

In a study of seventeenth century visual culture Svetlana Alpers extends these observations to suggest that Dutch life in the seventeenth century was dominated by representational assumptions, by an "Art of Describing".

While the Italians moved...to distinguish between what we can simply refer to as the real and the ideal, or between images done after life and those also shaped by judgement or by concepts of the mind, the Dutch hardly ever relaxed their representational assumptions.<sup>119</sup>

This impulse, she suggests, extended to the "deeds and works of man" as contemporary Dutch historians attempted to "cast off old prejudices" and look at the "naked truth".

In the Netherlands of the time the humanist and rhetorical mode of historical narration was under assault from revisionists who wanted history to have a firm factual basis. References are made to the blind superstitions of the past: the Catholic Church and monastic chronicles with their miracles were particularly suspect.<sup>120</sup>

The "representational assumptions" to which Alpers alludes were, of course, part of an overall shift in European thought in the seventeenth century which Foucault identifies as a progression in which language, words or signs, were no longer one with that which they designate, but came to represent something outside themselves, an observable reality.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>119</sup> S. Alpers, *The Art of Describing. Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, London: Penguin Books, 1989, First Published 1983, p. 40. This interpretation has not been accepted by all Dutch critics and, in particular, by those whose work concentrates upon the emblematic aspects of Dutch *genre* painting. For an earlier observation on the hidden "symbolism" of "realist" Dutch painting, see Haley *The Dutch in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 129; but see also pages 134 and 137 where Haley appears to contradict himself and refers to the "realism" of Dutch art and to the "bourgeois" character of the paintings and their market.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

The written word ceased to be included among the signs and forms of truth; language is no longer one of the figurations of the world, or a signature stamped upon things since the beginning of time. The manifestation and sign of truth are [newly] to be found in distinct perception. It is the task of words to translate that truth if they can; but they no longer have the right to be considered as a mark of it.<sup>121</sup>

Seventeenth century Dutchmen in Sumatra certainly approached language as a representation of reality rather than its manifestation. The preoccupation with material reality which students of Dutch culture have noticed in this period may, in part, be attributed to the bourgeois ethos of the new Republic and its radical, even revolutionary, break with the old world of the European Renaissance.<sup>122</sup>

However real words and titles may have been in a local schema, for Dutch merchants in Sumatra the elaborate titles and rhetoric associated with Minangkabau sovereignty could not be more than a "bare name and appearance without deed". The Dutch participated in and manipulated the "symbolic" authority of the Minangkabau royal family, but their own cultural assumptions led them to stand outside a world in which words themselves might be seen as manifestations of power. Given the importance of rhetoric, of words, signs and titles, for Minangkabau royal status Dutchmen were bound to disparage its significance. The meanings of Minangkabau sovereignty remained for them "terra incognita".

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By the 1690's, then, the disillusioned critique of royal power which had been initiated by Pits in 1669 had developed in force. Read in context these dismissive

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<sup>121</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, New York: Vintage Books, 1973, p. 56.

<sup>122</sup> On homely and material values in seventeenth century Dutch Culture see Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, passim.



assessments of Minangkabau sovereignty can be seen as contemporary seventeenth century reactions to specific circumstances, failed expectations and experienced cultural differences. They are not always read in context, however. Not only has the tone of Pits', van Leene's, Le Sage's and Lobs' judgments been echoed in later writing, but a particular emphasis has been placed on statements of royal powerlessness. In 1761, for example, van Basel wrote an account of early Dutch relations with west Sumatra which was based on the seventeenth century records. In his words the ruler's authority was "more spiritual than worldly" and his palace "could scarcely be distinguished from the miserable huts of his impoverished subjects".<sup>123</sup> Evidently van Basel had read Le Sage, but had not consulted Dias' report of his mission inland in 1684 or that of the Malays who visited Negeri in 1668, both of which describe an elaborate court with its conventional etiquette. In the hands of later writers, such as Willinck and Loeb, we have seen, this caricature of the context and state of actual knowledge within which seventeenth century reports were produced was to take on an even more exaggerated form.<sup>124</sup>

This chapter has attempted to tease out several strands in the fabric of seventeenth century relations between the Minangkabau royal house, people of the west coast *pesisir* and VOC representatives in the region and several themes touched upon here will recur in later chapters. The main aim, however, has been to investigate how Minangkabau ruler's communicated with the *rantau* and to examine the role of words, letters, titles and royal seals in relations between the inland court and the coast. Letters, it emerges, were a vital means by which royal authority was proclaimed and enacted in the coastal regions. Letters were requested by leaders on the coast and

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<sup>123</sup> J.L. van Basel, "Begin en Voortgang van Onze Handel en Bezittingen op *Sumatra's Westkust*," *TNI*, vol.9, 2, (1847), pp.47-8.

<sup>124</sup> Loeb, *Sumatra*, p. 102. This is discussed in Chapter One above.

sent out from the court. They were also used to announce the ruler's authority and to intercede on behalf of local leaders with the VOC administration. Letters and credentials authorised and embodied claims to kingship<sup>125</sup> and were, as we saw in Batangkapas, accepted and respected by local people and, when it suited them, by the Dutch.

The Dutch, though preoccupied with deeds, certainly noticed the importance of words in the west Sumatran world. In name and title the VOC were perfectly prepared to acknowledge the "royal power" of the Minangkabau kings and Dutch letters, as well as Dutch translations of Malay letters, often used the term "love" to describe local attitudes towards the rulers. The Dutch also noticed the importance of letters in generating action and promoting dissent among the king's subjects and, as opposition to the Dutch intensified, words and letters were increasingly seen to be dangerous.

These letters were not just a medium for communicating information. On the contrary, their contents were remarkably consistent. Rather than transmitting various messages, most were composed of what the Dutch called "honour titles" and proclamations about the ruler's descent from Iskandar Zulkarnain. The Dutch referred to these as "orders" (*opdracht*), "letters of command" (*bevel brieven*), "letters of compliment" (*compliment brieven*) and "mandates". As the Malay letter quoted in footnote 107 above, suggests, the Malay term for "orders" which the Dutch were translating was *titah* - the word, utterance or command of a Malay ruler.<sup>126</sup> To explore why mandates carrying the *titah* of Minangkabau kings were such a potent force we must leave the narrative of cultural encounter in west Sumatra and turn to Malay sources to examine the form and style in which the kings spoke to their subjects.

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<sup>125</sup> On one occasion, we have seen, a letter is described as a manifestation of royal authority.

<sup>126</sup> Wilkinson, *Malay-English Dictionary*, part II, p. 1228.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SURAT CAP:

#### THE ROYAL VOICE OF MINANGKABAU KINGS

Thus far Minangkabau royal words have been apprehended from a distance through the translations of seventeenth century Dutchmen, and, moreover, we have concentrated upon their impact and reception. It is possible, however, to move beyond the Dutch sources and explore the language of Minangkabau authority. This chapter uncovers the existence of a previously unstudied corpus of nineteenth century Malay letters from Minangkabau kings which share many characteristics and much of the language of earlier letters encountered by the VOC. These Malay letters offer an entrée into the language of Minangkabau authority and a context against which earlier statements can be considered and compared.

Yet, as with many of the remaining fragments from Minangkabau's past, it is difficult to approach royal utterances except through a veil of European perceptions. The "pompous" and "high sounding" titles assumed by the Yang Dipertuan were the aspect of the Minangkabau ruler's prestige which most annoyed and puzzled Europeans. Indeed the irritation and anxiety produced by the royal edicts, letters and seals from Minangkabau is, in itself, remarkable. According to Marsden,

The titles and epithets assumed by the sultans are the most extravagantly absurd that it is possible to imagine. Many of them descend to mere childishness; and it is difficult to conceive how any people, so far advanced in civilization as to be able to write, could display such evidences of barbarism.<sup>1</sup>

To demonstrate this Marsden reproduced a royal "warrant" sent from Pagaruyung to a *tuanku* of Sungai-Paguh, probably in the late eighteenth century. The "warrant" incorporates three circular seals inscribed in Arabic with the names of the Sultans of

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<sup>1</sup> W. Marsden, *The History of Sumatra*, (London, 1811; Reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1966), pp. 337-8.

Rum (the Ottoman Empire<sup>2</sup>), China and Minangkabau. After that the Sultan of Minangkabau is described as a descendant of "Iskander zu'lkarnaini" who possesses a crown brought from heaven by Adam. The Sultan's other possessions are also listed, including the "mountain *Si-guntang-guntang*, which divides Palembang and Jambi", "the buffalo named *Si Binuwang Sati* , whose horns are ten feet asunder", and many other items and attributes.

The text of this letter, in the abbreviated form in which Marsden presented it, is reproduced here in order to convey for the reader the flavour of the text to which Marsden reacted. The English is Marsden's and this can be compared with the romanized transcription of two Malay letters contained in Appendix Four where one letter is also translated.

Three circular Seals with inscriptions in Arabic characters

(Eldest bother)

Sultan of Rum

**Key Dummel Alum**

**Maharaja Alif**

(Second brother)

Sultan of China

**Nour Alum**

**Maharaja Dempang  
or Dipang**

(Youngest brother)

Sultan of Menangkabau

**Aour Alum**

**Maharaja Dirja or Durja**

The sultan of Menangkabau whose residence is at **Pagar-ruyong**, who is king of kings; a descendant of raja **Iskander zu'lkarnaini**; possessed of the crown brought to heaven by the prophet Adam; of a third part of the wood **kamat**, one extremity of which is in the kingdom of **Rum** and another in that of China; of the lance named **lambing lambura** ornamented with the beard of **janggi**; of the palace in the city of **Rum**, whose entertainments and diversions are exhibited in the month of **zul'hijah**, and where all **alims**, **fakiahs**, and **mulanakaris** praise and supplicate **Allah**; possessor of the gold-mine named **kudarat-kudarati**, which yields pure gold of twelve carats, and of the gold named **jati-jati** which snaps the **dalik** wood; of the sword named **churak-simandang-giri**, which received one hundred and ninety gaps in conflict with the fiend **Si Katimuno**, whom it slew; of the **kris** formed of the soul of steel, which expresses an unwillingness at being sheathed and shews itself pleased

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<sup>2</sup> Rum is an Arabic term for the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire, latterly the Ottoman Empire.

when drawn; of a date coeval with the creation; master of fresh water in the ocean, to the extent of a day's sailing; of a lance formed of a twig of *iju*; the sultan who receives his taxes in gold by the *lesong* measure; whose betel stand is of gold set with diamonds; who is possessor of the web named *sangsista kala*, which weaves itself and adds one thread yearly, adorned with pearls, and when that web shall be completed the world will be no more; of horses of the race of *sorimborani*, superior to all others; of the mountain *Si guntang-guntang*, which divides Palembang and Jambi, and of the burning mountain; of the elephant named *Hasti Dewah*; who is viceregent of heaven; sultan of the golden river; lord of the air and clouds; master of a *ballei* whose pillars are of the shrub *jalatang*; of *gandarangs* (drums) made of the hollow stems of the diminutive plants *pulut* and *silosuri*; of the anchor named *paduka jati* employed to recover the crown which fell into the deep sea of *Kulzum*; of the *gong* that resounds to the skies; of the buffalo named *Si Bunuwang Sati*, whose horns are ten feet asunder; of the unconquered cock, *Sengunai*; of the coconut-tree which from its amazing height and being infested with serpents and other noxious reptiles it is impossible to climb; of the blue *champaka* flower, not to be found in any other country than this (being yellow elsewhere); of the flowering shrub named *Sri-menjeri*, of ambrosial scent; of the mountain on which the celestial spirits dwell; who when he goes to rest wakes not until the *gandarang nobat* sounds; He the sultan *Sri Maharaja Durja* furthermore declares, &c.

Of this letter Marsden further suggested that,

Probably no records upon earth can furnish an example of more unintelligible jargon; yet these attributes are believed to be indisputably true, by the Malays and others residing at a distance from his immediate dominions, who possess a greater degree of faith than wit.<sup>3</sup>

Simple prejudice cannot be claimed to account for Marsden's reaction to this Minangkabau letter. As the author of a *Dictionary and Grammar of the Malay Language*, and as a collector of local manuscripts during his stay in Bengkulu, he was familiar with the style and language of Malay composition. Indeed he goes on to make the point that it is only in this specific area that Minangkabau writing seems to him to be ridiculous.

It is at the same time but justice to these people to observe that, in the ordinary concerns of life, their writings are as sober, consistent, and rational as those of their neighbours.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp.340-341.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.341.

Marsden's perception that the Minangkabau "warrant" was odd is echoed in the estimates of other commentators from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, who refer to the ridiculous and "pompous" edicts of the Minangkabau kings.<sup>5</sup> For many who have approached Sumatran history, the language of authority and sovereignty used by representatives of this court has seemed quite out of proportion to the "actual" power of the rulers. The intensity of these European reactions may offer the modern historian an intriguing signal. As Robert Darnton points out, it is often in the places where a culture, or another system of thought, seems most opaque that we may, by careful study, come closest to an understanding of "the other". "When we cannot get a proverb, or a joke, or a ritual, or a poem, we know we are on to something."<sup>6</sup> Minangkabau letters have occasionally been transcribed and translated in works like Marsden's for precisely the reason that they couldn't be "got".<sup>7</sup> They are presented as examples of an "other" style of thinking and as a symbol of the rational weakness inherent in the other system.<sup>8</sup> As such the letters represent that intimate moment in

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<sup>5</sup> Numerous sources refer to the "pomposity" of Minangkabau royal rhetoric. F. de Haan, described the ruler's edicts as "absurd" in "Naar Midden Sumatra", p. 361; and Newbold called them "pompous credentials", T.J. Newbold, *British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, (London, 1839), vol. II, p. 81. In 1715 C.F. Hofman, a Dutch East India Company servant in west Sumatra, referred to the "ridiculous circumstances" with which kingship was attended in Minangkabau, F.W. Stapel, "Een Verhandeling over het Ontstaan van het Menangkabausche Rijk an zijn Adat", *BKI*, vol. 92 (1935), p. 464;

<sup>6</sup> Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, London: Penguin Books, 1985, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Of a second "extraordinary" letter from the Minangkabau ruler, Marsden wrote "I esteem it too curious to hesitate about inserting it", *The History of Sumatra*, p. 339. It was, perhaps, against his better nature that Marsden yielded to this temptation to include the merely "curious". As Mary Quilty has shown in a recent study the major impetus behind Marsden's writing was a rejection of the "fabulous" and an emphasis upon "scientific" values, *Textual Empires*, Unpublished MA thesis, University of Melbourne (1992), pp. 24-31.

<sup>8</sup> It is striking how often these letters have exhibited in published works in this way without any serious comment upon their contents. Examples of Minangkabau letters appear not only in Marsden's History, but also in a Dutch manuscript *Beschrijving van Sumatras West-Custe*, which was compiled in Padang in about 1730 (KITLV. HS 166, pp. 5-10); in Newbold, *British Settlements*, vol. II, pp. 81-87; in J.H. Moor, *Notices of the Indian Archipelago and Adjacent Countries*, (London: Frank Cass and Co., First Published, Singapore 1837,

cultural contact where the experience of meeting simultaneously fascinates and repels.

Seventeenth century Dutchmen approached Minangkabau letters through veils of cultural difference, while modern, western, historians, such as the author of this thesis, contend with both culture and time. By examining Minangkabau royal rhetoric in context, however, it may be possible to come closer to an understanding of the "other" by which Marsden felt so confronted, and to appreciate the part played by royal words in the Minangkabau kingdom. This chapter considers Minangkabau letters as a genre with specific conventions which had an important role in Minangkabau political life from at least the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.

### The Scope of Minangkabau Letters

Although the "warrant", and another letter published by Marsden, are sometimes referred to by scholars, the royal letters and edicts of Minangkabau have received little detailed attention. The best known examples are the two published by Marsden and a letter sent to the Minangkabau settlements of the Malay Peninsula which was published in English translation by both Newbold and Moor in the first part of the nineteenth century. Only two relatively obscure publications from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries comment in any detail upon letters from Minangkabau and two publications include facsimiles of letters in Malay.<sup>9</sup> Of the few

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Reprinted 1968), pp.255-261; and in Kielstra, "Onze Kennis van Sumatra's Westkust", pp. 502-5. Like Marsden, Kielstra noted how ridiculous the letter was when he included it in his article. A discussion of the way in which cultures exaggerate each other's differences can be found in James A. Boon, *Other Tribes, Other Scribes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, Chapter One.

<sup>9</sup> Minangkabau letters are discussed by A. L. van Hasselt in *De Talen en Letterkunde van Midden-Sumatra*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1881, pp. 170-80 which reproduces one letter and translates another; by F.D.K. Bosch, in "De Rijkssieraden van Pagar Roejoeng", *Oudheidkundige Verslag*, (1930), pp. 202-215; and by Ed. Dulaurier who published a facsimile of one letter (discussed below) in *Chrestomathie Malaye. Lettres et Pieces Diplomatiques ecrites*

letters which are available in published form only these two appear in Malay and these are in *jawi* script. It is, therefore, not surprising that the letters have tended to be treated out of context, as remarkable exceptions, rather than as examples of a literary form which requires reading within its historical and literary context. In the course of this study, however, a larger group of letters from Minangkabau has been identified, including a number in their original Malay form. Together, they represent a much greater concentration of Malay letters emanating from the Minangkabau court than was previously thought to exist and one which may tell us much about representations of royal authority in Sumatra.

In particular, a corpus of Malay letters, mainly from the nineteenth century, will allow comparison with letters which are available in English, and especially in Dutch, translation from an earlier period. Copies of between 50 and 60 royal letters from Minangkabau are held in the VOC archives for the years between 1668 and 1740 and many others are referred to in contemporary Dutch reports. VOC scribes often abbreviated these letters and transcribed only what they saw as their "real" business.<sup>10</sup> It is common to find this "extraneous" material omitted by the scribes, with phrases such as "after the extended royal titles the contents are as follows"<sup>11</sup> or "after a mass of the usual Minangkabau titles the contents are as follows".<sup>12</sup> Fortunately not all Minangkabau royal letters were abbreviated in this way and there are a number in the VOC archives which have been translated almost in full.

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*en Malay*, Paris: L'Institut de France, 1845.

<sup>10</sup> Attention has been drawn to Van Leene's remark that a letter from Ahmad Syah in 1680 contained little but "honour titles", p. 157.

<sup>11</sup> SWK 1684 VOC 1386, f. 1013v.

<sup>12</sup> SWK 1720 VOC 1926, f. 21.; see also SWK 1723 VOC 1980, f. 79. The "verbose Arabic introduction" to such letters was also omitted, see SWK 1725 VOC 2013, f. 107 and many other royal letters.



Comparison with the corpus of nineteenth century Malay letters reveals a remarkable consistency in form and style. It is this consistency, coupled with the distinct characteristics of Minangkabau letters, which suggest that they may best be considered as a genre, or sub-genre, of Malay letter writing embodying a specific mode of royal articulation.

What were these characteristics and what distinguishes these Minangkabau letters from letters sent by other Malay rulers?

### Malay Royal Letters

Letter writing was an important aspect of diplomatic intercourse in pre-twentieth century Malay societies. Royal letters were treated with the greatest respect. Indeed Malay scholars have often noticed how a ruler's letters were regarded in Southeast Asia with the same honour as the ruler himself.<sup>13</sup> Reid, for example, has cited La Loubère's observation in 1691, that ambassadors were given little honour in comparison with the respect paid to the letters they carried.

An ambassador throughout the East is no other than a King's messenger; he represents not his Master. They honour him little in comparison of the respects which are rendered to the Letters of Credence whereof he is the bearer....Every one therefore who is the carrier of a letter from the King is reputed an ambassador throughout the East.<sup>14</sup>

Reflecting the magnificence of the rulers they represented royal letters were often highly decorated manuscripts, employing elaborate calligraphy and gold leaf. The layout of a letter, and the arrangement of its contents, followed prescribed custom and

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<sup>13</sup> According to Barbara Andaya, "the letter was regarded as a representative of the sender". *Abode of Grace*, p. 82.

<sup>14</sup> The conventions of diplomacy in Southeast Asia is examined in Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, vol. II, Chapter Four (Forthcoming). Royal letters are discussed in some detail by Barbara Andaya, *Abode of Grace*, pp. 81-3.

embodied fine distinctions of status in visual form. The lustre of such letters as, for example, the one sent by the ruler of Aceh to James I, or that sent by Sultan Muhammad Syah of Riau to Raffles, mirrored the glory and sovereignty of these rulers.<sup>15</sup>

It has often been observed that Malay letters were written according to a formula and, in a nineteenth century publication devoted to Malay correspondence, E. Dulaurier identified the component parts of Malay letters in the following way. Some letters include a heading or *kepala surat*, typically a phrase in Arabic. Most carried the seal of the sender. An Arabic exordium or eulogy was often placed below this. Next came the main body of the letter, *perkataan*, containing its message. And following this was a conclusion, *termaktub*. The address, the *alamat surat* was usually placed on the outside on the envelope, *sampul surat*, which, in the case of royal letters, was often made of silk.<sup>16</sup> Apart from a range of typical phrases used for the *kepala surat* and the exordium, the content of letters varied according to their particular purpose.

### Minangkabau Royal Letters

Minangkabau letters, on the other hand, have certain precise contents whose presence helps to distinguish them from Malay letters in general. Some contain a *kepala surat*. Most have an Arabic exordium and often a description of the creation

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<sup>15</sup> Illustrations of both these letters can be found in a newly published, and lavishly presented, work. A. Teh Gallop, and B. Erps, *Golden Letters, Surat Emas: Writing Traditions of Indonesia*, London: The British Library, Jakarta: Yayasan Lontar, 1991.

<sup>16</sup> Dulaurier, *Chrestomathie Malaye*, pp. 13-15. Wilkinson, who has also categorized the component parts of Malay letters, gives a similar description, with minor variations. R. J. Wilkinson, "Notes on Malay Letter Writing", in R. O. Winstedt, *Malay Grammar*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1939, pp. 183-205.

and foundation of the Kingdom of Minangkabau and the ruler's descent from Adam through Iskandar Zulkarnain, who was made God's representative on earth. Following this introduction, all important Minangkabau letters list the *kebesaran*, or signs of greatness, which rested in the keeping of the kings of Minangkabau. The structure of this list is formulaic and most letters use the same vocabulary. While the length of this section varies, key items are mentioned in most letters and there is a striking consistency in the *kebesaran* which are included. The message contained in these letters is often quite brief and usually served to remind inhabitants on the periphery of the sovereignty of Minangkabau and to claim safe passage and succour for the royal emissaries. Most letters close with a recitation of the royal curse of Minangkabau, the *besi kawi*. The details of this curse vary from letter to letter, but the provisions always state that those who obey the ruler's commands will prosper while those who disregard the royal word will find their lives blighted.<sup>17</sup> The homogeneity of Minangkabau letters, and the maintenance of these characteristics across centuries, will be demonstrated by a comparison of nineteenth century Minangkabau letters, written in Malay and surviving in manuscript form, with earlier seventeenth and eighteenth century letters received and translated by the Dutch.

One group of Malay letters which does appear to be similar in style to those from Minangkabau are the letters sent from Acehnese rulers like Iskandar Muda. Surviving seventeenth century letters from Aceh describe the ruler's greatness and list his attributes and possessions in the same fashion, in phrases which are piled upon

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<sup>17</sup> The origins of this term are not entirely clear, but it seems to imply the "force of iron". "*Kawi*" is an Arabic term for "obligatory force", while "*Basi*" is a Minangkabau variation on "*Besi*" or "iron". According to Wilkinson "Iron plays a great part in sorcery and oaths and was once regarded as talismanic", *Malay-English Dictionary*, vol. 1. Iron was found in the Minangkabau highlands and, like gold, this was one of the preserves of the Minangkabau royal family. Dobbin refers to the special power, or *sakti*, which this metal was believed to contain, see *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 116, also pp. 67-70 where she discusses the royal family's role in the extraction of iron.

each other. Some similar terms are used and, like the Minangkabau letters these Acehnese examples list parts of Sumatra which belonged to the king.<sup>18</sup> Given the early date of these letters it is possible, even likely, that the style of Minangkabau writing was influenced by that of Aceh and possibly also by Acehnese texts such as the *Bustanu'l Salatin* which contains information about Iskandar Zulkarnain and the creation of the universe. Little of this early seventeenth century Acehnese literature is easily available and a detailed comparison is, therefore, difficult. It is clear, however, that Minangkabau letters, while superficially like those of Iskandar Muda are actually quite distinct. Features of format, most of the regalia items listed and the geographic world which the letters depict are quite specific to the Minangkabau group and are not present in the available Acehnese letters. The question of external influence, therefore, has been treated here as secondary to the objective of identifying the conventions of Minangkabau royal writing.

The format and visual impact of Minangkabau letters is quite distinct. It is usual to find a seal and the correct placing of a royal seal was of crucial importance.<sup>19</sup> Minangkabau letters sometimes carried three seals, representing the rulers of Minangkabau, China and Rum, all three of whom were said to be descended from Iskandar Zulkarnain. Moreover Minangkabau royal letters also incorporated a series of small medallions or pseudo seals, described in the letters as *bab* or sections, listing the names of rulers from Sumatran and other kingdoms, who were said to be descended from the Yang Dipertuan of Minangkabau. In most of the examples where we have

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<sup>18</sup> See for instance a letter from the ruler of Aceh to Queen Elizabeth I of England written in 1602, reproduced in W.G. Shellabear, "An Account of some of the oldest Malay MSS. now extant", *JSBRAS*, vol. 31 (1889-99), 107-51. A letter from Iskandar Muda to James I is published in A. Teh Gallop and B. Erps, *Golden Letters, Surat Emas: Writing Traditions of Indonesia*, London: The British Library, Jakarta: Yayasan Lontar, 1991.

<sup>19</sup> Leonard Andaya has commented on the way in which a misplaced seal might be taken as a direct insult of the ruler addressed, *Kingdom of Johor*, p. 89.

access to the *jawi* original, or to a facsimile, these medallions either encircle the letter or are set around or beside the royal seal and above the letter. This arrangement is illustrated in a letter from Rao on Plate Eight. The Minangkabau royal seal is consistent in shape, in a lotus leaf design and, in some letters, the same seal is applied three times. These characteristics will be illustrated and discussed in more detail below.

A third important feature which distinguishes these Minangkabau letters, relates not to their form and content but to their purpose. As already mentioned, most of the Malay royal letters collected by Europeans and surviving today are diplomatic letters from one ruler to another. While this applies to some Minangkabau examples, the bulk of surviving Minangkabau letters were intended for local consumption and were sent or circulated within Sumatra. In many cases these were what Dulaurier described as letters of *creance*, or credentials, which accompanied envoys from Minangkabau travelling to the *rantau* regions and farther afield. Others incorporate grants of authority which were used by local deputies and chiefs. The letters were, in fact, part of Sumatran political life. That these letters were intended for the king's subjects not for a brother ruler, makes them especially interesting.<sup>20</sup> The survival of a body of such letters is exceptional and can tell us much about the structure and character of the Minangkabau kingdom.

Little work has been done on the question of genre in pre-modern Malay literature and any attempt to categorise texts from an historical period when we have little information about their reception is fraught with difficulty. Nevertheless in order to understand the possible meanings of a text we must have some idea of how it was

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<sup>20</sup> Malay rulers do appear to have used letters for local communication, although these have rarely survived. Dutch sources mention that the ruler of Aceh sent "Boedjangs" or letter-carriers from Aceh to the west coast ports in the seventeenth century. *Dagh-Register*, (1663), p. 84.

"read".<sup>21</sup> Genre, therefore should be treated as a dynamic concept involving consideration of the reception of a work and the expectations it aroused.<sup>22</sup> Reception therefore may be considered as a fourth category by which Minangkabau letters can be distinguished. In a sense this theme spans most of the present study and several chapters consider the reception of royal letters in the Minangkabau *rantau*. We know that letters were requested by Minangkabau subjects, as when various west coast groups asked for and received "mandates" from Suruaso. These "mandates" were a source of empowerment which appear to have been particularly associated with anti-Dutch protest. The efficacy of Minangkabau letters is also illustrated in the way that letters from the court were later incorporated in local texts chronicling the past of particular Sumatran dynasties. This applies to Minangkabau *Undang-Undang* and *Tambo*, and also to texts from the coastal regions to which the Minangkabau kings sent their messages.

These basic features, contents, form, purpose and reception have been employed to identify Minangkabau royal letters as a distinct genre of Malay epistolography which will be referred to by the term *surat cap* or "seal letters". Most Malay letters carry seals, of course, but on the Minangkabau letters the seals are unusually prominent and also numerous if one includes the pseudo-seals or medallions. Furthermore several of the Minangkabau letters refer to themselves as seals - "*cap ini*" or "*cib*" (which I take to be a form of the Malay word *cap*).<sup>23</sup> Some refer to themselves

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<sup>21</sup> Or heard in this case, since it is likely that Minangkabau letters were often read aloud and in public, rather than alone and in silence. See Chapter Ten below, note 50.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of this question see J. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, London: Routledge, 1975, pp. 136-7.

<sup>23</sup> The following letters refer to themselves as a *cap*; Cod. Or. 5825, l. 17; Ml. 332; Cod. Or. 4818 l. 24; Cod. Or. 2241 l. 32 reads "*surat cap*"; and Ml. 483 uses *cib* on lines 65, 68 and 71. The van Hasselt letter refers to itself as "*surat ini*" (l. 33) as does Ml 332 and the Rao letter (l. 27). Cod. Or. refers to itself as a "*surat tambo*" (l. 25) as well as a "*cap*". These manuscripts are listed below.

as *Tambo* and three have been romanized and given the title *Tambo* by a local historian. *Tambo*, meaning written account of origin and ancestry, is a confusing way of referring to these letters, however, since it also refers to larger Minangkabau texts dealing with origins and history. Wilkinson defines *surat cap* as an official document, and since three letters actually describe themselves as *surat cap*, this term seems an appropriate label for the group as a whole.<sup>24</sup>

### Minangkabau Surat Cap

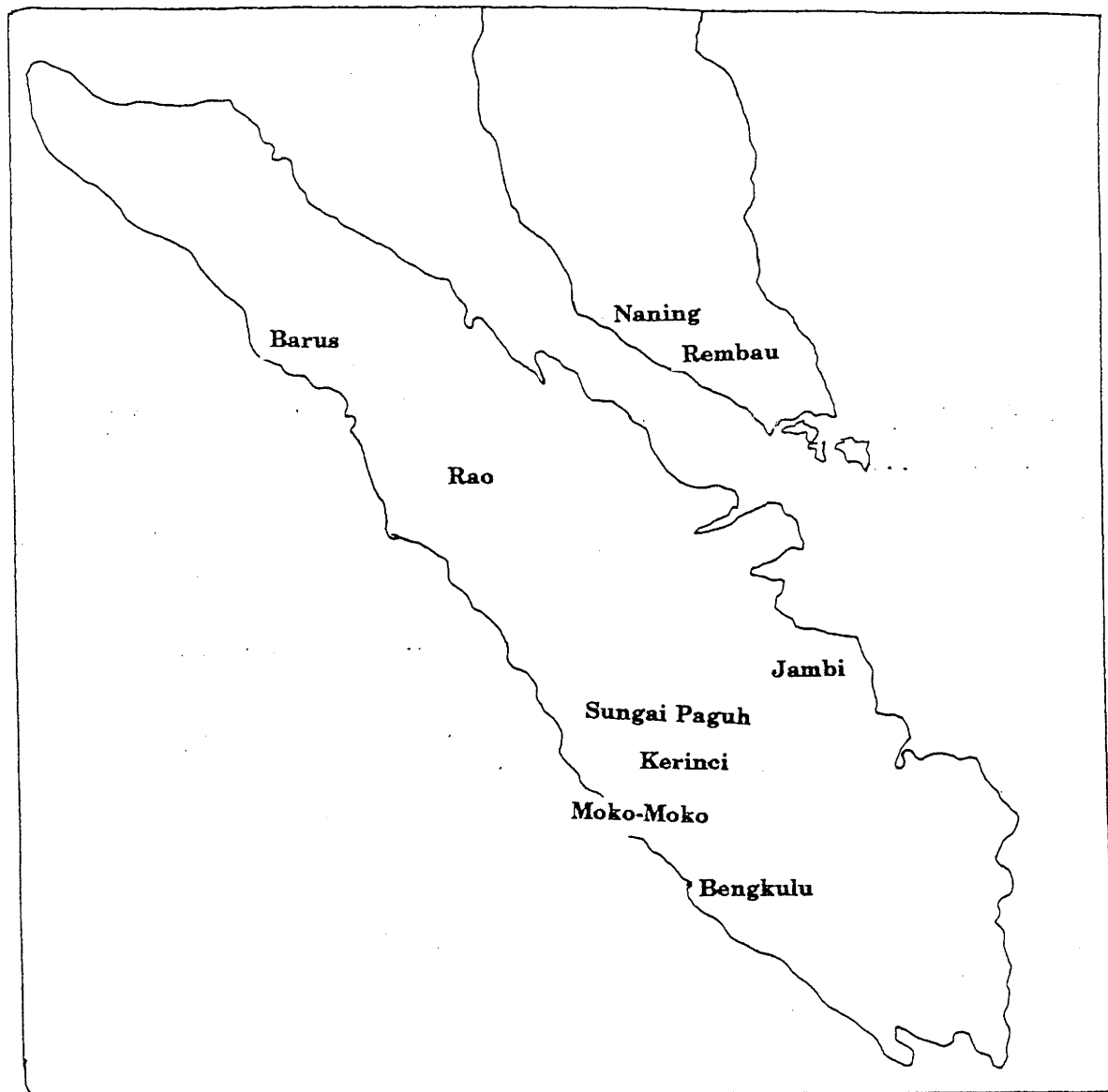
It will be useful at this point to examine briefly the royal letters from Minangkabau which are available in Malay form. Space does not permit a thorough editorial commentary. For this reason a discussion of what is known about the background of each letter, the state of the manuscripts and the problems they present for transcription and translation has been located in Appendix Four.

For the present purpose of establishing generic conventions particular attention will be given to common features of the letters. Each text is briefly described here, a map of their distribution is included as Plate Three. Most of the letters appear to date from the nineteenth century, although few are actually dated. There are various ways in which the letters could be classified: only some are in *jawi* script; some are held in museum collections while others belong to private family collections in Sumatra; some are longer than others and some carry the same royal seal. But, for the present purpose, the letters are presented according to the use to which they appear to have been put. They are classified, therefore, in four categories as: a) credentials which were

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<sup>24</sup> See Cod. Or. 2241 l. 32; the van Hasselt text also refers to itself as "*surat cab ini*" on l. 34. Part of a larger text from Barus in north west Sumatra belongs to the *surat cap* genre (included as No. 16 below), and this is also described as a "*surat cab*", Drakard (ed.), *Sejarah Raja Barus*, p. 186. In 1988 I misread this as "*surat bab*".

# KNOWN DISTRIBUTION OF SURAT-CAP





intended to be used in a wide variety of contexts; b) letters granting a seal or an authorization to an individual sometimes doubling as credentials; c) fragments of text with similar contents; and d) *surat cap* which are incorporated in larger texts, usually functioning as an emphatic opening.

The following list of Malay letters can be categorised as *surat cap*.

### MINANGKABAU SURAT CAP

#### a) Letters of Credential

##### 1. Dulaurier/Newbold/Korn

Letter of Credential. A facsimile of this *jawi* text has been published by Ed. Dulaurier; a reduced copy of that facsimile stands at the front of this thesis. An English translation of the same letter is found in Newbold's *British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*. A Malay romanization also held in the V.E. Korn collection.<sup>25</sup> Newbold associated the letter with Raja Labu who is assumed to have been a Minangkabau prince sent to rule in Negeri Sembilan in 1826.<sup>26</sup> In fact the letter does not mention Raja Labu. It asks that the bearer be treated well wherever he is met on land or sea, and a number of places are listed, in Sumatra and further afield, where this good treatment is expected. The curse, or *besi kawi*, of the royal family is called upon anyone who defaults in this and the injurious effects of the curse are detailed. The letter carries three large seals all of which contain approximately the same Arabic text.

Above the letter, to the right of the ruler's seals are ten medallions containing the names of rulers in Sumatra who are said to be children of the Yang Dipertuan in Pagaruyung and founders of their own *negeri*. Aceh, Banten, Inderagiri, Inderapura, Jambi, Palembang, Pariaman, Rokan, Siak and Sungai Paguh are listed in this way.

A romanization and translation of this letter has been placed at the end of this section in order to provide an example of the form and style of a typical *surat cap*.

##### 2. Cod. Or. 2241

Letter of credential. A *jawi* copy of a letter held in Leiden University library.

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<sup>25</sup> Ed. Dulaurier, *Chrestomathie Malaye. Lettres et Pieces Diplomatiques ecrites en Malay*, item 15; Newbold, *British Settlements*, vol. II, pp. 81-6; V.E. Korn collection, Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land, en Volkenkunde, MS. no. 365, entitled "Gescheidenis van de Afstamming van een Sumatraans Vorstenhuis".

<sup>26</sup> Newbold, *British settlements*, p. 89.

One cover note states that the piece was copied in Banten in AH 1215 (AD 1800). Another note accompanying the letter states that it came from a Minangkabau prince, Raja Linggang Lakut. The letter may, therefore, have been associated with Raja Labu's predecessor in Negeri Sembilan, Linggang Laut, who is thought to have ruled there between 1808 and 1824.<sup>27</sup> The name Raja Linggang Lakut/Laut is not mentioned within the letter which appears to be a credential carried by a prince of the Minangkabau court. Most of this letter is very similar to No. 1 above in wording, but, after the *kebesaran* list, it states:

This seal letter [*surat-cap*] from the Yang Dipertuan of Pagaruyung honours Tuanku nan Muda. The purpose of this is so that wherever he may travel, if any slave or subject does not show honour to Daulat Yang Dipertuan Muda, in whatever *negeri*, then they will be struck by the *besi kawi* of Yang Dipertuan Sakti in Pagaruyung.

Tuanku nan Muda could easily have been Raja Linggang Laut and the similarity with letter No. 1 may indicate that they were both intended to introduce Minangkabau princes on the Peninsula, but there is no certain evidence of this. The letter bears one large, but illegible, seal and nine medallions with the same names as those of the rulers in No 1, except for Raja Rokan.

3. ML. 483 (Illustrated in Plate Four)

Letter of Credential held in National Library, Jakarta. A visually spectacular letter written on a long scroll, 194 cm. by 27 cm. Decorated in red and black ink, with a representation of, probably, a royal palace which is annotated with the names of items of Minangkabau *kebesaran*. Above this sit three royal seals, apparently belonging to Sultan 'Abdul al-Jalil Mua'azim, and ten medallions naming the same rulers as No. 1 above. The structure of the letter is similar to both Nos. 1 and 2 above, but the introduction, describing Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain's descent from Adam and the placing of a ruler on earth, is more extended. The letter is said to be a *cib* (or *cap*) and it demands safe passage for the bearer in similar terms to 1 and 2 above. A square at the foot of the letter is surrounded by floral decoration and this contains an additional note in a different hand. The note is difficult to decipher but it appears to introduce a follower of the Raja Alam named Datuk Permato nan Putih who travelled to the *rantau* between 1818 and 1829. It seems likely that the note was added after the initial preparation of the letter. The entire border of the scroll is surrounded by the word, Allah, repeated many times and written in red ink.

4. *Tambo Asa*

Credential in scroll form. This manuscript is held in a private collection in Indonesia and it is regarded with great reverence.<sup>28</sup> Only a photo-copy of the letter has been sighted. Place of origin or discovery unknown. The MS is damaged, but it probably carries three seals and ten medallions. The format is

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp. 87-9.

<sup>28</sup> Details are discussed in Appendix Four.

similar to the letters described above and it introduces an un-named Raja who was its bearer. Unlike the other letters this one is said to have come from the Bendahara of Sungai Tarab in the presence of the four ministers of state, the Besar Empat Balai who are named in the letter. It is said to have been "written in Pagaruyung".

5. Van Hasselt - Jambi (Illustrated in Plate Five)

Published facsimile of a *jawi* letter found in Jambi in late 19th century.<sup>29</sup> Letter or credence apparently from the Yang Dipertuan in Pagaruyung to introduce Tuanku Haji Dayang Daulat Muhammad Nur Syah al-Bugis. The Sultan instructs all subjects to attend to the Haji's teachings which are said to be "consistent with our religion". The letter carries a heading, *kepala surat*, with the words *Kaul al-hak*, "the word is the truth". The most prominent seal on this letter is that of the named Haji rather than the ruler. The letter is surrounded by 16 medallions, nine of which mention the usual Sumatran rulers and three of which mention rulers from further afield including those of "Makasar Pulau Bugis", Mengkassar and Banjar, none of whom are described as descendants of the Minangkabau ruler. It is possible that this may be an unauthorized adaptation of a *surat cap*.

6. *Tambo nan Selapan*

Letter in scroll form.<sup>30</sup> This appears to be a conflation of two documents and may have been an adaptation or "forgery". Only a photocopy of this MS has been viewed by the present writer, but according to one local expert it belongs to the family of the Tuan Gadang at Batipu. The *Kaba Cindua Mato* suggests that the Tuan Gadang set himself up in opposition to the Yang Dipertuan family. The seal is a copy of the usual royal *cap* and the *jawi* text includes some roman numerals which suggests a relatively late date. In form the letter is a standard *surat cap* credential without medallions, but incorporating ten *bab*, or sections, listing the usual coastal rajas descended from the Yang Dipertuan of Pagaruyung. Copied within the letter is another document which has been published in the *Adatrechtbundels*. This carries a seventeenth century date (1640/3) which is improbably early for various reasons discussed in Appendix Four. This fragment of text records a meeting held in Balai Janggo, Pagaruyung, in the presence of the Tuan Gadang and the Yang Dipertuan where it was agreed to send eight representatives (the Raja nan Selapan) to become rulers on the coast to represent the court in the *rantau*.

7. ML. 332 Lebong

This MS was viewed by van Hasselt in the possession of a Raja Pasirah of Muara-Aman in Lebong (Bengkulu) during the late nineteenth century. Van Hasselt gives a Dutch translation of the MS, and a romanized Malay version of the same text has been identified in the National Library, Jakarta. The letter

<sup>29</sup> A.L. van Hasselt, *De Talen en Letterkunde van Midden-Sumatra*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1881, pp. 170-5.

<sup>30</sup> Described in more detail in Appendix Four.

reads as both a credential requesting safe passage for the bearer and a specific grant of authority. It is stated that: "This is the seal of Yang Dipertuan which is conveyed to the Depati in the Negeri Lebong with reference to Negeri Silit. That is the meaning in this seal and if there is any trouble and obstinacy then it is intended as a lasting reminder." Although van Hasselt described two identical seals to the left and right of the head of the letter, no medallions are present on the existing copy of the text. In other respects its contents are similar to other *surat cap* described above. The account given here of Minangkabau origins is longer than that in some texts and the list of *kebesaran* is somewhat shorter.

8. Cod. Or. 4818 (Illustrated in Plate Six)

A large, and visually impressive, original *jawi* letter held in Leiden University Library. Bears the royal seal of Minangkabau and 10-11 medallions which name the rulers of Aceh, Banten, Inderagiri, Palembang, Pariaman and Sungai Paguh and also, atypically, the names Raja Iskander Zulkarnain and Raja Suleiman. The form of the letter is similar to the credentials listed above, but in this case the letter mentions a recipient. It records the visit of a descendant of the Yang Dipertuan Sakti to Bengkulu where he was met and honoured by Datu' Muda Situmbuk who was granted a royal seal.

b) Grants of Authority

9. Cod. Or. 5825 (Illustrated in Plate Seven)

This MS, held in Leiden University Library, appears to be a *jawi* copy of the original letter. It records the grant of a seal to Orang Kaya Ma' Panghulu from the Yang Dipertuan in Pagaruyung. Like the van Hasselt MS this letter is headed with the words *Kaul al-hak*. The text of the letter is encircled on three sides by medallions. The first to the right, identified by a double rim, is that of a Sultan Maharaja Diraja, Abdul al-Kalil. Following that, in a clockwise direction, the medallions list the names of the rulers of Aceh, Pariaman, Inderapura, Sungai Paguh, Tanjung Berah, Palembang, Jambi and Inderagiri. The letter carries no date, it is relatively short, but in other respects its form and contents are similar to the letters already described.

10. Rao (Illustrated in Plate Eight)

An original letter, preserved as a *pusaka* (heirloom) by the descendants of the Yang Dipertuan of Padang Nunang in Rao. Written on a large sheet of paper (45 by 46 cm.), with medallions surrounding the main seal and extending round two sides of the letter. The royal seal is stamped upon a separate square of paper which appears to have been attached to the document, suggesting an adaptation of another letter. This *surat* departs from the credential format and describes how the authority of the ruler of Padang Nunang is supported by Pagaruyung, by God and by other Sumatran rulers who are descended from Pagaruyung. The names of these rulers stand within the ten medallions. Like many other letters, these list the names of the rulers of Aceh, Banten, Inderagiri, Inderapura, Jambi, Palembang, Pariaman, Siak, Sungai Paguh and, in this case, Padang Nunang.

11. Sungai Paguh (Illustrated in Plate Nine)

An original *jawi* letter in scroll form (148 by 33.5 cm.), illustrated with plant and squid motifs, and decorated in red ink. This MS also carries a *kepala surat* with the words *Kaul al-hak*. The letter is in the possession of the descendants of the royal house of Sungai Paguh in Balun, who treat it as a precious heirloom. The letter represents a grant and confirmation of authority for the ruler in Sungai Paguh who was a descendant of the Yang Dipertuan in Pagaruyung. This letter contains many of the same features as the others described here. It includes a description of the origins of Minangkabau kingship, a list of rulers descended from Minangkabau (not placed in medallions) and a list of *kebesaran*. It also contains additional details about Sungai Paguh and may have been adapted from other Minangkabau *surat cap*. One part of the MS has a *pro patria* watermark indicating a date in the second half of the nineteenth century.

c) Fragments of Text with Similar Contents

12. ML. 396 Kerinci

Two *jawi* letters are contained in a collection of MSS from Kerinci which is held in the National Library, Jakarta. Both of these relate the glory of the ruler of Minangkabau, including descent from Iskandar Zulkarnain. Both of these list many of the usual items of regalia. They refer to early agreements made between the four Depati of Kerinci and the ruler of Pagaruyung.

13. KITLV OR. 414 Kerinci (Illustrated in Plate Ten)

Part of a collection of photographs of MSS taken by P. Voorhoeve in Kerinci in 1941. Includes two Minangkabau *surat cap*. One with medallions and seal is illegible and the other is only partly legible but it appears to be part of a scroll bearing a Minangkabau seal. The contents of this text are similar to others described here. The end of the letter is only partly legible and it is therefore difficult to ascertain whether it was intended as a credential, a grant of authority or both. Other fragments in this collection appear to be part of similar Minangkabau letters.

14. Van Hasselt also saw a letter which, according to him, took the same form as other Minangkabau royal letters. This was part of an *Undang-Undang* in the 12 Kota, which was held in the possession of the Kepala Panghulu there.

15. A further royal letter from the ruler of Minangkabau to a Sultan of Mokokoko was sighted by Marsden who translated part of it into English in his *History of Sumatra*, (pp. 339-40). Judging from Marsden's translation there are slight differences from the format of most *surat cap*.

d) *Surat Cap* Incorporated in Larger Manuscripts

16. Sejarah Tuanku Batu Badan

The opening pages of a Malay royal chronicle from Barus in north west

Sumatra appear to be a copy of a Minangkabau *surat cap* like those described above. The letter, or *surat cap*, was said to belong to one Sagit Tuah of Negeri Padang Luar. It had been received from the Yang Dipertuan of Minangkabau in Negeri Pagaruyung and was to be passed on to his descendants. This was a copy, and no medallions are represented, but these appear to have existed in the original letter and 10 rulers are mentioned in the usual way, these being the rajas of Aceh, Banten. Inderagiri, Inderapura, Jambi, Palembang, Pariaman, Rokan, Siak and Sungai Paguh. Three representations of the royal seal of Minangkabau are included and these appear to be similar to the seal used in Nos. 1, 3 and 7 above. The seal is said to have been copied onto the MS because it was old. A romanization of this *surat cap* can be found in Appendix Four.

16. ML 143. *Asal Usul Bengkulu*

A similar Minangkabau letter is located at the beginning of another, longer, text relating to the west coast *pesisir*, this time concerning Bengkulu. The text is held in the National Library, Jakarta.

17. ML 27. *Undang-Undang Minangkabau I*

Another text in the same collection, this is one of the oldest known copies of the *Undang-Undang Minangkabau* (1865). The text opens with a set of medallions drawn in red ink, with the names of founding rulers of Sumatra, including those listed in most letters described here. Unfortunately the opening pages of the text are now too damaged to be read, but the MS was translated into Dutch by E. Netscher in the nineteenth century. Although this is not a *surat cap*, other parts of the MS make frequent reference to the same material as the *surat cap* genre, including items of regalia and these parallels will be discussed below.

18. SOAS MS 36561

A *Salasilah Minangkabau* from AD 1873, held in the London School of Oriental and African Studies, also contains medallions listing the names of the rulers of Sumatra who were descended from Pagaruyung.

These *surat cap*, and associated fragments of text, have important features in common including their contents, structure and physical format. They show that the two letters published by Marsden and Newbold were not remarkable exceptions but were, instead, part of a regular mode of contact between the Minangkabau court and the *rantau*. Given the fragile state of those MSS which have survived the ravages of the Sumatran climate, we can assume that these few texts represent the remains of a much more substantial body of letters circulating in Sumatra. This is supported by the

many references to Minangkabau royal letters, or "bevel brieven", in the seventeenth and eighteenth century Dutch records. Indeed, letters, which were either sent or have been adopted, as grants of authority may still exist in private hands in Sumatra, as is the case with at least four of the texts listed above.

The existence of a corpus of Malay letters enables us to analyse their structure and contents in the context of Minangkabau and Malay literary traditions. The remainder of this chapter will consider the structure of the *surat cap* and the links between these letters and others from an earlier period, while a more detailed consideration of the words used by Minangkabau rulers, and their impact in Sumatra, will be postponed until Chapter Ten.

### The Date of the Malay Letters

Most of the letters surveyed here come from the nineteenth century although few can be dated precisely. Marsden lived in south west Sumatra between 1771 and 1779 and described the example he translated as being "of recent date". The next in age is No. 2 OR. 2241, which carries a cover note attributing a date of 1800 AD. The seal on this letter was not legible when the transcription held in Leiden was made. Four other manuscripts carry what appears to be the same seal. These are No 1 (Dulaurier/Newbold/Korn), No.3 (ML 438), No. 7 (ML 332) and the Barus text listed as No. 15. The seal is standard lotus shaped Minangkabau *cap* containing the inscription:

al-wāthiq bi-ghayyāti 'l-lāhi  
'l-'azīm Maharaja  
Diraja ibn Sultān ibn Marhūm  
Sultān 'abdi 'l-jalīl mu'azzam

(The one trusting in the designs of God almighty, Maharaja Diraja, the Sultan

who is a son of the late Sultan Abdul Jalil servant of the glorious one).<sup>31</sup>

Does the use of this seal assist us in dating the individual letters? Newbold, who saw letter No. 1, spent three years in Melaka from 1832, and claimed that Raja Labu had brought the letter with him from Sumatra in 1826. It is likely, therefore, that the letter was produced during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century. But the use of the same seal on three other letters is not necessarily proof of their exact contemporaneity since the metal stamps upon which seal inscriptions were engraved may have been used over a number of years and have been held in the possession of royal delegates outside the court.<sup>32</sup>

The seal stamped on letter No. 11 from Sungai Paguh is the same as a stamp which van den Bosch saw and photographed in Pagaruyung in 1931 (Illustrated in Plate 11). This reads:

Sultan  
Tunggul 'Alam Bagagar  
ibn Sultan Khalifā Allah  
yang mempunyai takhta kerajaan  
dalam negeri Pagaruyung dāru  
'l-quddār Johan berdaulat  
zillu'llāh fi'l-'ālam

(The Sultan who supports the earth, Bagagar [the great one], son of God's deputy, who possesses the throne of rulership in negeri Pagaruyung, abode of the potent ones, Johan berdaulat [possessed of divine power], the shadow of God on earth.)

The Minangkabau seal transcribed on the van Hasselt letter from Jambi (No. 5) appears to be an adaptation of the same seal which may suggest that this letter was indeed a copy or forgery of another letter adapted for the use of Muhammad Nur Syah

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<sup>31</sup> In other copies like the Barus text the word order of this seal is not always transcribed exactly. The bottom left hand seal on the Dulaurier letter is the clearest. I am grateful to Dr A. Street for his help with this, and other examples of Arabic transcribed here.

<sup>32</sup> When travelling through Sumatra in 1989 I was shown the stamps of Minangkabau royal seals, known as "stempel" in Sumatra, in the households of descendants of the royal family in frontier regions of the kingdom, including Buo and Rao. Similar stamps are said to exist in Basrah, Inoman and Ceranti in the Kuantan region.



al-Bugis. Of the other letters carrying seals only Cod. Or. 5825 (No. 9) is partially legible and this appears to be the seal of a ruler who was the son of the late Sultan Abdul Kali' al-'azim.

Assuming that the Arabic appellations used in these seals were also employed as royal titles, we can deduce the names of a Sultan Abdul Jalil, Sultan Alam Bagagar and Sultan Abdul Khali' al-'azim. Alam Bagagar Syah and Sultan Abdul Jalil were royal titles used by Minangkabau kings in the nineteenth century, but also before that time. VOC records, for instance, mention that a Minangkabau prince, Sultan Abdul Jalil, led several rebellions in the coastal regions of west Sumatra in the 1740s.<sup>33</sup> The Abdul Jalil seal from the letter incorporated into the Barus royal chronicle may, therefore, have come from that period. Moreover the same title was probably used by different princes in successive generations, as with the titles Ahmad Syah and Inderma Syah in the seventeenth centuries.

The whole question of identifying individual rulers by use of their royal seals is also complicated by the Padri War and the massacre of the Raja Alam's sons and other members of the family which took place in 1815. Alam Bagagar Syah, who may be the ruler named in the Tunggul Alam Bagagar seal above, was a nephew of the old Raja Alam Sultan Muning Syah, and it was he who represented the royal house in dealings with the Dutch and English after 1815.<sup>34</sup> When the Dutch returned to west Sumatra in 1819 and sought to build an anti-Padri alliance they signed a treaty with this prince (in 1821), although they also refused to recognise the old royal entitlements and kingly honours due to the Minangkabau rulers.<sup>35</sup> It is possible, therefore, that some of the

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<sup>33</sup> Van Basel, "Begin en Voortgang", p. 79. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Nine below.

<sup>34</sup> Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 151-2.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142 and pp. 151-2.

letters identified here were part of a royal response not just to Islamic reformists in Sumatra, but also an assertion of kingly authority in the face of increasing opposition.<sup>36</sup>

Although the Padri war and attacks on the royal house may have had an effect on the number and frequency of letters sent by members of the royal family, *surat cap* were sent out prior to 1815 and we know that they were not just a nineteenth century development. This is demonstrated by a comparison with seventeenth and eighteenth centuries letters held in the VOC archives.

### ***Surat Cap* Over Time**

Certain limitations stand in the way of a comparison of the nineteenth century *surat cap* with earlier letters from the Minangkabau court. The former, we know, were intended for local consumption, but the letters which survive in Dutch translation in the VOC archives were, necessarily, those which were written to the Dutch. Royal credentials were certainly distributed in the seventeenth century, as we saw from the Raja Dua Celas revolt. The "mandates" sent out from the court to "rebel" *panghulu* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries probably also conformed to the same conventions as those *surat cap* which embodied credentials and conferred authority in the nineteenth century. We know that these letters existed although we do not have access to the texts themselves. In spite of this we can come close to an idea of their language and style by examining the letters sent from Minangkabau rulers to the Dutch. Many of these employed the same language and show surprising continuities over a long period of time. To explore the parallels between royal words in the

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<sup>36</sup> This is an avenue for future research. It has not been possible, within the time limits placed on the present study, to investigate this question in the nineteenth century colonial archives which are held in the Netherlands.

seventeenth and nineteenth centuries we may direct our attention to three main categories in their discourse.

### God's Deputies

One of the most persistent messages contained in Minangkabau royal letters from at least the seventeenth century until the family was virtually eliminated in the nineteenth century was the claim that the king was a representative of God on earth. This was a declaration which must have infuriated Muslim reformers in the early nineteenth century and may have contributed to Padri hostility towards the rulers. Letter No. 1 is typical in its opening:

Ya Bisturin [?], I see you as the greatest Sultan, shadow of God on earth, the lord of noble things, famous among the Arabs and non-Arabs and everywhere that good things exist. The proof of mankind, yes great lord of the world, as it is said in the Qur'an in every day and every night remaining under judgment until the last day, accountable to Muhammad, the lord of messengers and to the outcome for pious people, Amen lord of the worlds.

As God, may he be exalted, decreed in the Qur'an of the merciful one [to the king ?] I created as proofs the sun and the moon and I am placing on the earth a Khalif to represent me. Then I created spirits and humans to worship me in the world.<sup>37</sup>

All *surat cap* make a statement of this nature and refer, thereby, to Sura II, Ayat 30 of the Qur'an, where it related that God spoke to the angels and announced "I will create a viceroy on earth" (*fi'l-ard Khalifa*). Adam was that viceroy and in the *surat cap* genre the position of Minangkabau kings as "Shadow of God on earth" (*zillu'llāh fi'l-'ālam*) was derived through their descent from Adam and his son, Iskandar Zulkarnain. The royal letters all relate this ancestry at varying length.

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<sup>37</sup> For the *jawi* text of this letter see Dulaurier, *Chrestomathie Malaye*, and Plate One here. A romanization and translation can be found in Appendix Four. The Arabic text here lacks certain prepositions and poses some other puzzles. I am grateful Dr A. Street for contending with these.

Some of the royal seals mentioned above also include the phrase *zillu'llāh fi'l-ālam*. Minangkabau rulers were not alone in this. The same phrase was incorporated in the Acehese royal seal and was used by many Malay rulers.<sup>38</sup> But while the claim itself may look conventional to those familiar with Malay royal texts, it is the consistency and insistence with which this was articulated by Minangkabau kings that is remarkable. Such consistency cannot be dismissed. In particular, as we shall see in Chapter 8, it had pressing relevance towards the end of the seventeenth century when Sumatrans found themselves under increasing pressure from the Dutch monopolists.

In seventeenth century letters translated into Dutch we do not have access to the exact Malay and Arabic terms used by the rulers, but we do find the same messages articulated. It has already been noted that seventeenth century rulers of Minangkabau claimed to be representatives of God. In 1679 the princely claimant Sultan Ahmad Syah sent a letter to Batavia in which he described himself as God's appointee and his "stedehouder" in the world. The Padang official, Hurdt, referred to this ruler as "Sultan Caliphatulah".<sup>39</sup> This was a resounding letter in which the prince announced that:

All love, praise and honour is offered to God from the illustrious Sultan who is celebrated by the whole world, who is highly esteemed and is true-hearted to all his subjects who are likewise very powerful and populous since God the master has called him to the kingdom to govern over all men. For that high prize God has raised him up and God has also commanded all his subjects to be obedient to the "Moorze" religion, and to maintain the credit and dignity of the kingdom which has true belief.

Who is also to be future king and the greatest king below the wind, as it is

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<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of the royal seal of the Sultans of Aceh see G.P. Rouffaer, "De Hindostansche Oorsprong van het 'Negenvoudig' Sultans-Zegel van Atjeh", BIK, vol. 59 (1906), pp. 349-389 and J. Siegel, *Shadow and Sound: The Historical Thought of a Sumatran People*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979. The Acehese seal is also discussed in Chapter Nine below. The use of the phrase "Shadow of God on Earth" by Malay rulers is discussed by A.C. Milner in "Islam and the Muslim State", in M.B. Hooker (ed.) *Islam in Southeast Asia*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983, pp. 35-8.

<sup>39</sup> SWK 1680 VOC 1348, f. 1006v.

written by God's hand in the Qur'an, for this king has as his origin God's providence which is like a beam of bright sunshine; This is the king who has the command over the whole kingdom of Manicabo, whom God has strengthened.... God has therefore made him his stedehouder and greatest shining gift in the world and like a clear shining sun has established his ascendancy....<sup>40</sup>

Similarly in 1691 Inderma Syah sent a letter to Padang in which he stated

This letter is sent with a true and upright heart by the great, most powerful and highly esteemed lord, Yang Dipertuan Indermasahjie, who is an example to the whole world and a descendant of Alexander the Great, who has come into the world with a crown in place of God, in order to govern boldly and auspiciously with God's blessings and those of the prophet Muhammad. Yes that Emperor who has received power and authority from God and who possesses the most select and fortunate descent.<sup>41</sup>

The royal seal used by Ahmad Syah in 1668 included the words *zillu'llāh fi'l-'alam* and in 1732 the ruler of Suruaso was known to the Dutch as Yang Dipertuan Paduka Sri Sultan Indrama Riayat Syah *zillu'llāh fi'l-'alam*.<sup>42</sup> More unequivocally than some other Malay rulers Minangkabau kings developed the idea that they stood between man and God in this world. By showing obedience and devotion to the ruler, by remembering him in their prayers, subjects were told that they were acting in accordance with God's wishes and were following their religion.

By the nineteenth century this interpretation of Islamic kingship was under serious challenge in the Muslim world. Perhaps for this reason many Malay texts which have come down to us in nineteenth century recensions make less explicit claims concerning the relationship between king and God. In Minangkabau letters, however, we find a consistent message broadcast over a lengthy period. The Dutch were identifying an important aspect of Minangkabau kingship when they called the

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<sup>40</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 27 (1679), p. 32.

<sup>41</sup> SWK 1691 VOC 1485, f. 524v.

<sup>42</sup> SWK 1668 VOC 1268, f. 847. and SWK 1733 VOC 2240, f. 1129. See also SWK 1728 VOC 2074, f. 117. and other letters from this king, such as SWK 1717 VOC 1883, f. 32.; SWK 1720 VOC 1926, f. 21.; and SWK 1723 VOC 1980, f. 79.

rulers "priests"; though they misjudged the ruler's position in dismissing that role.

Linked closely to the notion of Khalifa Allah in Minangkabau utterances was the claim to descent from Iskandar Zulkarnain.

### Children of Iskandar

All the Malay *surat cap* listed above relate the Minangkabau dynasty's descent from Iskandar Zulkarnain and the beginnings of the Minangkabau kingdom. Descent from Iskandar is a claim made for Malay kings in many Malay texts and, in recent years, both V. Matheson-Hooker and the late L. Brakel have surveyed some of these references.<sup>43</sup> The Minangkabau letters, however, give a different account of the ruler's descent from Iskandar from most Malay texts. Rather than relating the story of Raja Chulan, told in the *Sejarah Melayu*, or the ancestry of Iskandar related in the Malay *Hikayat Iskandar*, Minangkabau letters, especially in the longer *surat*, are concerned with the first man, Adam, the creation of land and mankind and the descent of Iskandar as ruler over all. The letters explain that God created Adam as his representative (Khalifa Allah), that Adam's son Iskandar Zulkarnain became ruler in the world and that Minangkabau kings derived their Caliphal status directly from Iskandar who was father of Maharaja Diraja, the first Minangkabau ruler.

The treatment of Iskandar Zulkarnain in nineteenth century *surat cap* varies in length. Longer letters such as no. 3 (ML. 438) and no. 11 (Sungai Paguh) give quite extended accounts of Adam's descent to the intermediate regions between heaven and earth, of his role as the Caliph of God and the choice of one of his children to become

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<sup>43</sup> Virginia Matheson, "Concepts of Malay Ethos in Indigenous Malay Writings", *JSEAS*, vol. 10, 2 (1979), pp. 351-72 and L. Brakel, "Problems of Wahrheit and Dichtung: Islamic Historiography in Malay", Unpublished paper presented to the A.S.A.A. conference, University of New South Wales, May 1978.

ruler in the world with the title Sultan Hidayat Allah (the Sultan who is the gift of God). This was Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain to whom God and Adam presented the crown and sword of kingship. A bird was then sent from heaven to help Sultan Hidayat Allah to locate the land of Langkapuri between Jambi and Palembang which God had lowered to earth as a place for the first ruler. The three sons of the great Iskandar became rulers over Rum, China and Minangkabau.<sup>44</sup> This account, also given in Minangkabau *Tambo* and *Undang-Undang*, is included in more or less abbreviated form in all the nineteenth century letters.

Seventeenth and eighteenth century letters tend to be less detailed in their treatment of Iskandar Zulkarnain. This may be due to the fact that the Dutch translators omitted the Arabic openings of the Malay letters, even those which were translated at length by the Dutch.<sup>45</sup> Even in their abbreviated form, however, these earlier letters articulate descent from Iskandar as a central feature in the ruler's position. The letter sent by Sultan Ahmad Syah in 1679, for instance, announces that:

The same king was one of the grandchildren of the famed Alexander to whom belongs the crown that God promised to give to the three brothers of which the one is in Rum, the second in China and the third is in Manicabo ruler; the same is the continuing *stedehouder* of God from the beginning to the end, from the first to the last, who is always the same and remains eternally unchanging.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, in 1724 Sultan Inderma Syah wrote a letter to Padang which came, it was said:

with the upright and pure intention of Yang Dipertuan Paduka Seri Sultan Indrama Syah zillu'llāh fi'l-'ālam, being the lustre of the all powerful God and a grandchild or descendant of Iskandar, who is like a godly lustre and who possesses the crown of the world's two parts, who comes to be worshipped

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<sup>44</sup> See the romanized text of ML. 438 in Appendix Four.

<sup>45</sup> In Malay *surat cap* the story of descent from Iskandar is frequently interspersed with Arabic phrases and quotations from the Koran.

<sup>46</sup> Dagh-Register, vol. 27 (1679), p. 32.

through the power of God and the prophet...<sup>47</sup>

And, in the 1680's, we have seen that the two names adopted by the Rajas Dua Celas were Raja Iskandar Zulkarnain and Raja Pagaruyung. In 1686 Sultan Inderma Syah also wrote to Padang stating that he was the "Emperor" and son of the old king and that he alone, in that era, was descended from the "the great Alexander".<sup>48</sup> The Minangkabau ruler's link to God through his ancestors Iskandar Zulkarnain and Adam provided the source for many of the items of regalia to which the Minangkabau kings laid claim and which are mentioned in most letters from the court.

### Royal Regalia

One of the most distinctive features of the *surat cap* genre is the list of items of Minangkabau *kebesaran* which each letter contains. The content of this list varies, as does the number of items so listed, but certain *kebesaran* are mentioned in almost all Minangkabau *surat cap*. These include the royal crown, often described as belonging to the prophet Suleiman, a loom which operates on its own, moving once each year and being of the same age as the world itself, and a staff of wood, known as the *Kayu Kamat*, which was split into three pieces, each of which belongs to one of Iskandar Zulkarnain's sons, the rulers of Rum, China and Minangkabau. Other items regularly referred to in the Malay *surat cap* are the state dagger, known as *Curek Simandang Giri*, which received ninety notches from the struggle to slay the monster Si Katimuno, a piece of pure gold known as *Emas Jati Jati* and a lance known as *Lembing Lembura*, the hilt of which is inscribed with verses from the Qur'an. A drum made from Pulut-

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<sup>47</sup> SWK 1725 VOC 2013, f. 107.

<sup>48</sup> SWK 1687 VOC 1428, f. 562v. See also Jambi 1691 VOC 1485, f. 75v.; SWK 1704 VOC 1677, f. 20v.; Melaka 1704 VOC 1677, f. 72; SWK 1705 VOC 1692, f. 9.; SWK 1735 VOC 2315, f. 283; and also the other letters mentioned in note 37 above.



Pulut is often included and this was said to be made from the skins of lice. A palace with pillars constructed from the hearts of stinging nettles was also said to be in the possession of the rulers whose *kebesaran* also included rivers and mountains of gold, a mountain of fire and a flower known as Bunga Cempaka Biru.

If we turn to seventeenth century letters translated by the VOC we find that many of the same items are mentioned and the same format is used. Most Malay letters listing these *kebesaran* state that "He is the Sultan who holds in his keeping..." The term used is *menaruh* (to keep, harbour, entrust) rather than *punya* (possess). Dutch translations use the term *bezit* (to own), but *menaruh* may imply a looser, less tangible, link between the ruler and the signs of his greatness. A letter sent in the name of Sultan Ahmad in 1667 contains a list of *kebesaran* including the crown inherited from Iskandar and the staff which was divided between the rulers of Rum, China and Minangkabau. An English translation of this letter can be found in Appendix Four. In Dutch the list of individual objects is somewhat garbled, but it includes a lance made from seger wood, rivers of gold, a mountain of fire, a mountain of iron and a sea of fresh water, all of which are mentioned in later letters.<sup>49</sup>

A letter from the aspirant, King Ahmad Syah, in 1679 mentions the crown which came from Iskandar, the wood Kayu Kamat, the loom, Sangsita Kala, which weaves once a year, and in this version is said to be decorated with pearls and precious stones. The sword, Simandang Giri, with its notches from the battle with Sikati Muno is also included.<sup>50</sup>

Both of these regalia lists are relatively short compared to the lists in some of the nineteenth century *surat cap*, but over time the lists transcribed in letters to the Dutch become longer. It is difficult to know whether this was a development in

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<sup>49</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 17 (1666-7), pp. 297-8.

<sup>50</sup> *Dagh-Register*, vol. 27 (1679), p. 32.

Minangkabau letter writing or a question of changing attention to these matters on the part of VOC scribes. One possibility is that the letters became more elaborate in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as opposition to Dutch increased and this is discussed in more detail in the following chapter. It is certainly the case that later, eighteenth century, letters from the court read more and more like the nineteenth century *surat cap*.

A letter written to Padang from Inderma Syah in 1691, for example, includes mention of the crown, the Kamat wood, the loom, the flying horse called Semborani, the royal dagger, as well as a piece of gold carried on a pole, a bird in a golden cage, a golden saddle, a sacred clump of bamboo, and many other objects which are difficult to translate by way of seventeenth century Dutch but which are recognizable when compared to the Malay letters.<sup>51</sup>

In 1724 a letter came from another Inderma Syah (now spelt Indrama in the Dutch) contains a recitation of seventeen *kebesaran* in the keeping of the king including the most frequently cited items mentioned above. In this letter many of the *kebesaran* are described as gifts from God. For example:

yea the Sultan who possesses the tree Punagan Tarun which grows on its own which is a gift from God; the Sultan who possesses the weaving loom Sansita Kala which makes one thrust a year and which moves on its own and which is adorned with pearls and carbuncles which, on their own, give forth a fiery glow; the sultan who possesses the gold Sumandang Mantri which grew from nature on its own ... and which is a gift from God.<sup>52</sup>

We find, therefore, that there is a striking similarity in the *kebesaran* enumerated in seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century letters from the Minangkabau court and that the list of items appears to have grown over time. Marked similarities are also apparent in the terms used in Minangkabau letters from

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<sup>51</sup> SWK 1691 VOC 1485, f. 524v.

<sup>52</sup> SWK 1725 VOC 2013, f. 110.

the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries to articulate the ruler's Caliphal status and his descent from Iskandar Zulkarnain. Rather than containing random examples of "unintelligible jargon" these letters represent a coherent and consistent language of kingship specifically associated with the Minangkabau court. This discovery raises new questions about the role of kingship in Minangkabau and the place of rhetoric in Minangkabau sovereignty. One obvious question concerns the method by which these letters were produced in the highlands.

### Royal Writing

Minangkabau *surat cap* have an immediate visual impact. Whether laid out in a block or in scroll form the original Jawi texts are striking and impressive documents. In the context of a largely pre-literate, rural society the impact of a six foot long scroll, like ML. 483, would have been considerable. The use of the word Allah running as a border around the whole manuscript must have added to its power and served to enclose the text itself within a sacred frame.

Writing is often invested with particular power in communities where oral transmission of local knowledge is the norm. Among several Sumatran groups, including the Bataks and the Rejang, writing was used primarily for magical purposes and illustrated Malay texts on divination and astrology from Sumatra are also produced on scrolls which are similar in format to some *surat cap*.<sup>53</sup> As Sweeney expresses this point,

Writing is highly mysterious to oral man: the power to capture speech in signs

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<sup>53</sup> The power of writing in an oral context is discussed by Amin Sweeney in *A Full Hearing. Orality and Literacy in the Malay World*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, pp. 108-11. I have seen Malay scrolls of this type in Indonesia. See also the description of objects catalogued by Voorhoeve in Kerinci in the 1940's in P. Voorhoeve, "Kerintji Documents", BKI, vol. 126 (1970). pp. 369-99.

is awesome indeed, for the written message appears to be invested with secret meaning, even though the text may have no magic intent.<sup>54</sup>

Sweeney points to the respect paid to stone inscriptions and to written charms or amulets as examples of this pattern.

The use of writing as a medium for the transmission of power in Malay societies is demonstrated in the way in which seals alone might be used without an accompanying message especially in remote and rugged areas where communication networks were tenuous. In parts of west Borneo, for instance, the Malay rulers on the coast are said to have summoned the scattered Dyak communities inland by sending small slips of paper with the ruler's seal stamped upon them. Even European medals and seals, unintelligible to the Dyak, were on occasion used by local Malay leaders to rally Dyak support for their military campaigns.<sup>55</sup> A possible Sumatran example of the same sort of pattern is found in the collection of *pusaka* objects catalogued by Voorhoeve in Kerinci in the 1940's. Among these treasured objects were numerous scraps of writing on bark, horn, bamboo and cloth, including charms and agreements and two pieces of paper stamped with the seal of Sultan Muhammad Syah of Inderapura.<sup>56</sup> These seals may well have been sent to Kerinci in the same way that rulers in Borneo issued their seals as signs of authority in the outlying areas. Rulers who could write, or who had scribes in their service, had access, therefore, to a special source of power in the written word.

In the case of Minangkabau *surat cap* the physical similarity of the manuscripts and their stylistic coherence raise questions about their composition and production. Unfortunately little information is available to answer these questions. Philology

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>55</sup> S.H. Schaank, "Stamps on Malay Letters", *Young Pao*, Series I, vol. VIII (1897), pp. 106-7.

<sup>56</sup> Voorhoeve, "'Kerintji Documents'", pp. 376-7.

would encourage us to seek a model text through the nineteenth century letters, and this could, perhaps, be done. Some of the same phrases and names are used in all the *surat cap*. Texts can be read side by side, often for several paragraphs. An example here is MS No. 1, Dulaurier/Newbold/Korn, which compares closely with parts of the larger No. 3, ML. 483. To illustrate this romanizations of both texts are included in Appendix Four and the sections of text which are specific to ML. 483 have been indented. *Surat cap* No. 9, ML. 5825 can also be read partially against both of these letters.

Minangkabau scribes may well have used model letters and abbreviated or extended these as necessary. Some letters, like No. 10, the Padang Nunang text from Rao, were probably copied from other *surat cap* in the *rantau*. Nevertheless, a host of minor variations in the Arabic verses included, regalia listed, and the rajas mentioned would make a systematic comparison of the Malay letters a major task. In the absence of detailed and reliable information about the way in which each letter was produced and used, it is doubtful whether a detailed philological comparison would be a fruitful exercise.

Given that the format and content of *surat cap* was probably familiar within Minangkabau, what were the resources of the court for the production of these royal signs? Little is known about this and the scanty evidence available comes from the seventeenth rather than the nineteenth century. When Dias visited one of the rulers in 1684, for example, the king mentioned his journal, or *gedenckboek*. It was also noticed in Chapter 5 that the ruler referred, on this occasion, to the writings of his forefathers. The letters were produced by scribes rather than the ruler himself. And these appear to have been religious officials whose titles reflected their functions. One letter from 1703, for example was written by "Seri Ondana Fakir, priest of Yang Dipertuan",

another was by Maulana Kalai, and one in 1718 was transcribed by Imam Raja.<sup>57</sup> A common title used for officials and envoys of the Minangkabau court who are mentioned in VOC sources is *khatib*. It is not always clear whether this title is intended to refer to a *khatib*, a religious official and leader of prayers in the mosque, or to a *katib*, a writer and scribe. As Wilkinson points out, these two terms are often confused and it is possible that the two functions may have been combined in the one person in seventeenth century Minangkabau.

Company reports seldom make any reference to the physical appearance of Minangkabau letters unless they were uncertain about a seal. We cannot be sure, therefore, that seventeenth century letters from the court were as decorative as those distributed in the nineteenth century. There is some evidence, however, to suggest that similarities did exist. When Dias left the court of Yang Dipertuan Seri Pada Muda the ruler gave him an authorization granting him authority over Siak, Patapahan and Inderagiri. This may have been similar to later grants of authority such as *surat cap* Nos. 9, 10 and 11 listed above. The king also gave Dias two "*blancas*" or "*chartes blanches*" which were to serve as credentials. These are described as "handsome leaves of paper with the king's seal stamped upon them".<sup>58</sup> They must have been either a version, or a fore-runner, of the format used in the nineteenth century.

There can be no doubt of the value placed upon words and upon writing in the Minangkabau court in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We know not only that Minangkabau kings distributed letters far and wide, but also that letters were kept at the court. There may even have been some form of royal library or secretariat. Attention has already been drawn to the re-writing and re-issue in 1686 of a letter which Sultan Ahmad Syah had sent to Pits in 1668, which suggests that a copy must

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<sup>57</sup> SWK 1703 VOC 1664, f. 117; SWK 1703 VOC 1664, f. 86; and SWK 1718 VOC 1895, f. 69.

<sup>58</sup> De Haan, "Naar Midden Sumatra". p. 350.

have existed. In 1717, too, VOC servants mention that the same "*credents brief*" was used in successive years by two different princely representatives coming from Padang to the coast.<sup>59</sup>

It was not just the Malay letters which were preserved. In 1720 the departing Gezeghebber Abraham Patras wrote a *Memorie* for his successor, Nicolaas De Groot. He told De Groot to exercise care in responding to the lordly language used by the Minangkabau kings. A submissive letter from the Dutch, he said, might be preserved at the court and used later to embarrass the Company. This was just what had happened to him, he wrote, when he first arrived on the west coast. The Minangkabau king had sent him an old letter from one of Patras' predecessors, Abraham Boudens, along with a request from the king that former conditions should be restored.<sup>60</sup> Despite their distaste for rhetoric, the Dutch were discovering that words were powerful and dangerous. They had to be handled carefully or they took on a life of their own.

It was not just the Dutch who could not be sure of controlling their words. There is plentiful evidence that letters from the court were appropriated, used and re-used perhaps many times. They appear to have been adapted and fabricated for use in a variety of contexts especially in *rantau* regions. This became increasingly noticeable by the eighteenth century. In their letters to the Dutch the kings identified their envoys and used regular ambassadors, nevertheless in 1702 Sultan Ahmad Syah wrote to Padang warning against others who might pretend to be carrying letters from the Yang Dipertuan. He recommended that any such false envoys should be put in shackles.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> SWK 1718 VOC 1895(2), f.95.

<sup>60</sup> SWK 1721 VOC 1946, ff. 44-5.

<sup>61</sup> SWK 1703 VOC 1664, f. 258.

The evidence provided by nineteenth century letters helps us to understand how mandates and credentials, such as those carried by the Rajas Dua Celas could be adapted for use by aspiring princes who sought to accumulate support in the *rantau*. There were letters, like No. 5 (van Hasselt), which may have been outright fakes, and those such as Nos. 10 and 11 where the king's seal appears to have been cut from another letter and re-attached. Again, the impressive letter of credential, No. 3 (ML. 483), incorporates a specifically marked out space, apparently intended for information about the owners and the destination of the letter. The *surat cap* format lent itself to adaptation and appropriation. The free-ranging and mutable character of royal words should not, however, be construed as evidence of royal powerlessness. However, wherever and by whomsoever they were used, *surat cap* were broadcasting the message of an authority which Minangkabau kings derived from God and from Iskandar Zulkarnain. If individual rulers, by the nature of their seclusion under the clouds of Minangkabau and their dependence upon delegates in the *rantau*, were unable to control dissemination of the royal word, that, too, was part and parcel of the type of power which they transmitted to the Minangkabau periphery.

Royal letters reveal an awareness of the shape of that periphery. A prominent and recurrent feature of the nineteenth century *surat cap* is an impulse towards mapping and defining the *rantau* in relation to the kingdom in the inland centre. This is particularly apparent in the medallions naming rajas on the coast who were said to be descended from the Yang Dipertuan. In the *surat cap* these rulers, their negeri and the subordinate places to which their authority spread, represent a radiating network of centres linked to, and united by descent from the Minangkabau king. This pattern is also reflected in the recitation, which comes at the end of many *surat cap*, of the geographical world within which letters might be carried and within which the ruler's word was expected to be heeded. MS No. 1 is typical in this when it states



If this is conveyed to Siak and to Nilawan, to Patapahan and also to Kampar Kiri and to Kampar Kanan do not let it be destroyed, be it at sea or to Palembang and Inderagiri, be it to Rokan or to the villages of Rambai Tembusi, or to Batu Bara or to Pulau Penang or to Melaka and to Kedah, or be it to Jawa, to Batavia or to Susu or to Telaboh the same, or be it to Tra and to Bengkulu...<sup>62</sup>

The connection between the king inland and the coastal, *rantau*, regions is thus clearly emphasised in nineteenth century letters from the Minangkabau court. But what of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? Since none of the letters sent to the Dutch were credentials we do not know whether earlier examples of this form incorporated the same words and the same implied perspective on relations between centre and periphery in the Minangkabau world. Yet the evidence considered so far in this and previous chapters suggests that the maintenance of relations between the inland court and the coast and the transmission of authority from the centre to the *rantau* was a crucial aspect of the Minangkabau ruler's role.

To pursue the connection between court and coast in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries we must leave the Malay letters, temporarily, and turn back to the Dutch archives. A more detailed discussion of the language of kingship used in royal letters is postponed until Chapter Ten. This is because the Dutch sources can tell us still more about the way in which letters, signs and language emanating from the Minangkabau court helped to realise Minangkabau authority in the coastal regions of Sumatra.

Chapter Six showed how important royal mandates could be in focussing resistance to the Dutch and our discovery of the *surat cap* genre has revealed that these "bevel brieven" were a special sort of royal communication which focussed attention on the ruler's role as an intermediary for God. In the next chapter the discussion moves to a period of intense anti-Dutch activity in the late seventeenth

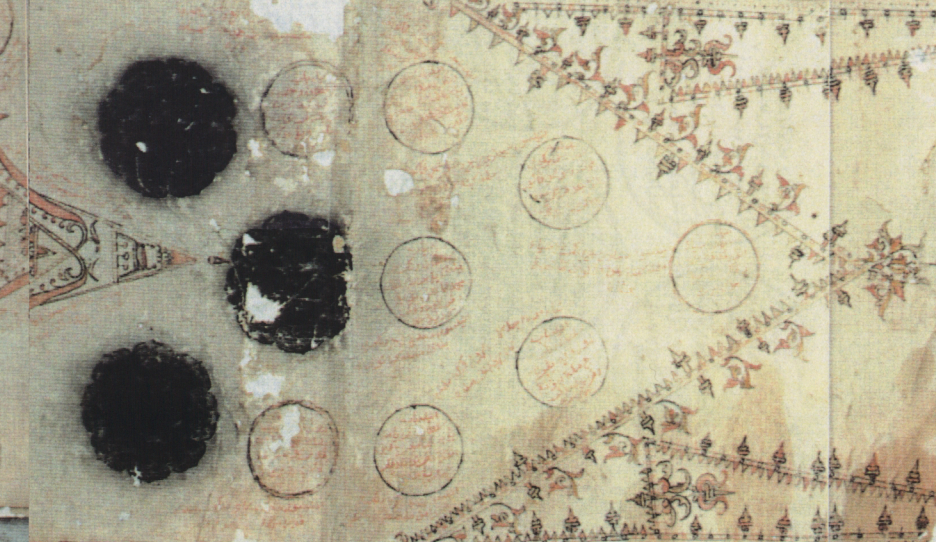
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<sup>62</sup> See the Dulaurier/Newbold/Korn MS transcribed in Appendix Four.

century. We go beyond west Sumatra and look at the way in which Minangkabau princes could offer leadership in a much wider geographic sphere. By probing what might be called the mechanism of empowerment in two specific contexts we learn more about the way Minangkabau messages of power were received in the coastal world.



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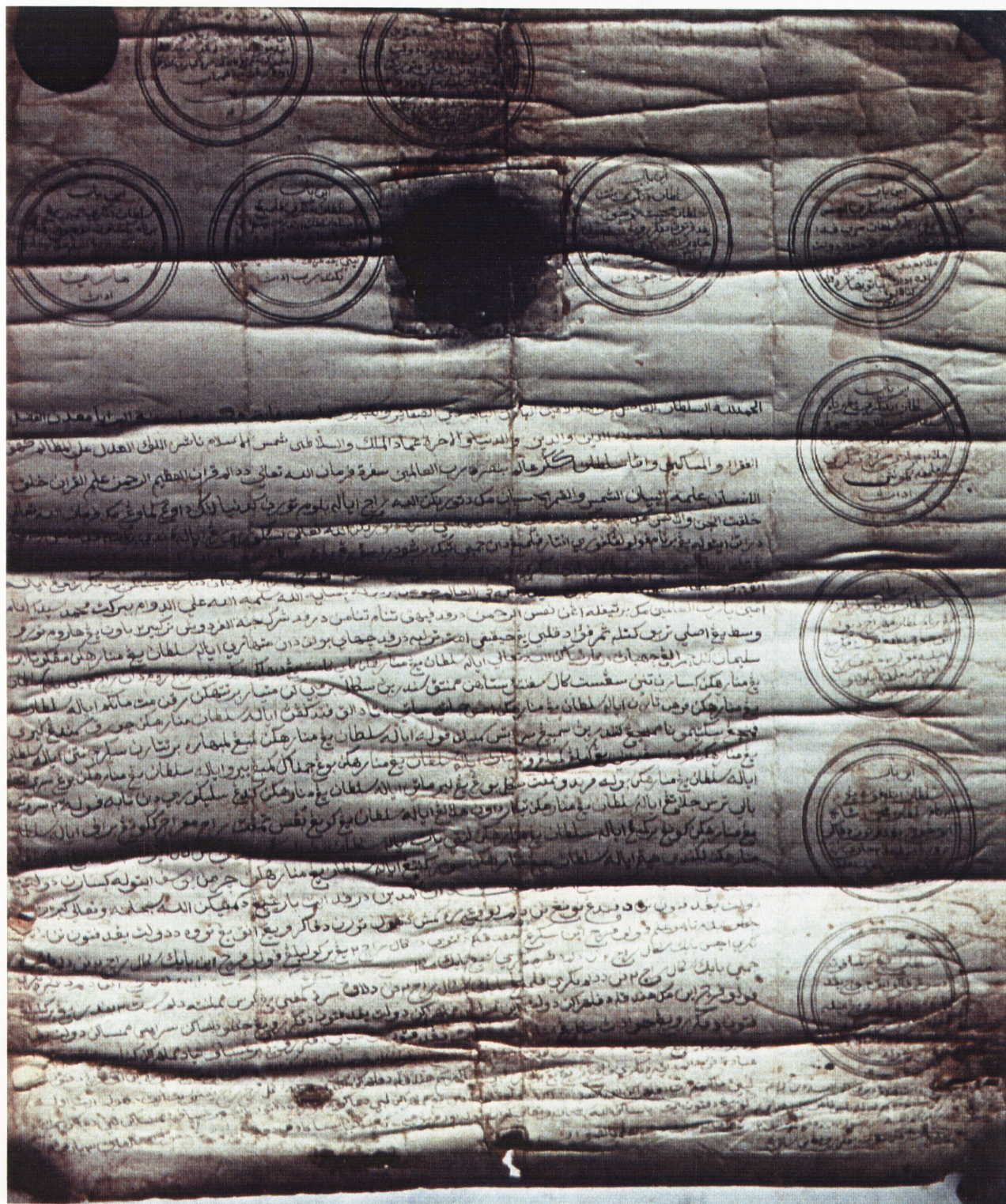


PLATE 8







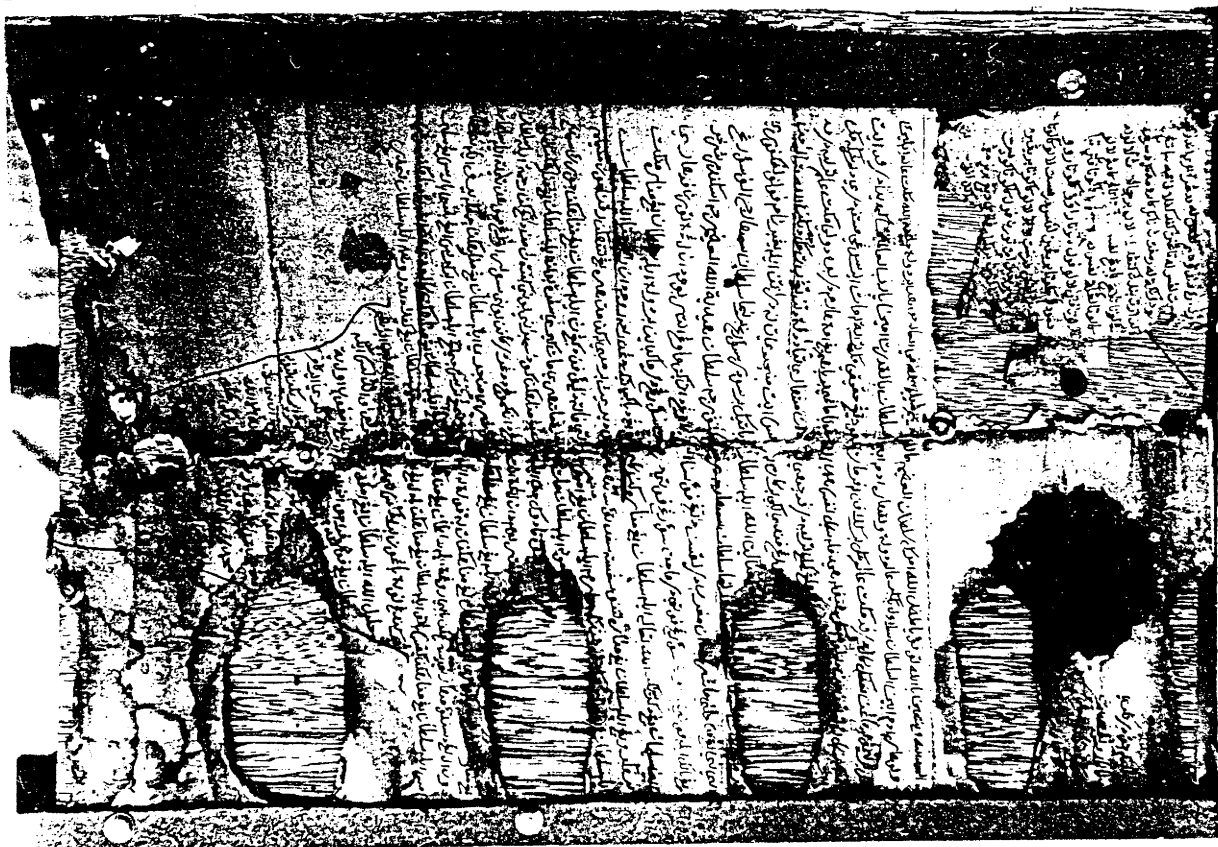
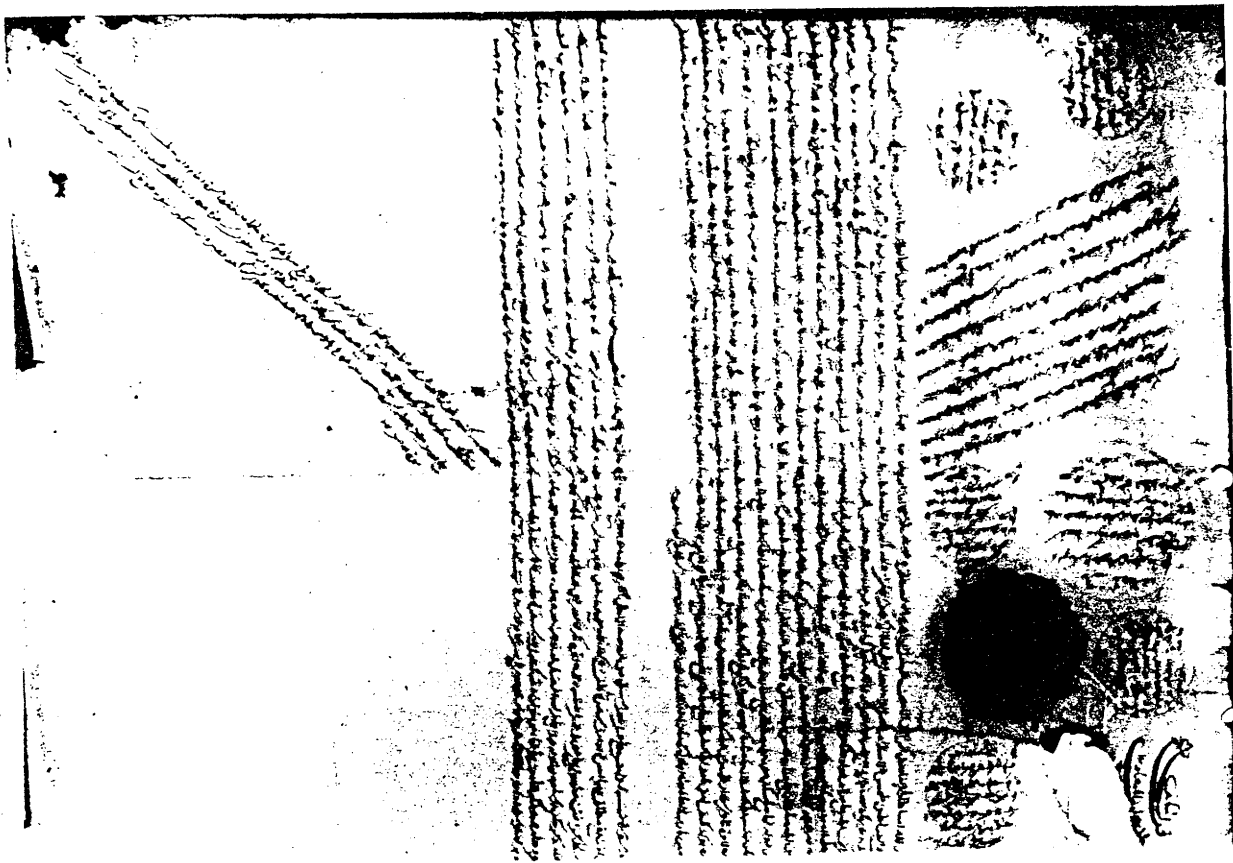




PLATE 11

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### SAINTS AND SIGNS

By the late seventeenth century local opposition to the Dutch East India Company was growing. All around the archipelago local kingdoms had fallen to Dutch military power or been weakened by the Dutch monopoly over local trade. Surprisingly, perhaps, in this context, Minangkabau princes emerged as significant leaders in local movements of anti-Dutch resistance. Minangkabau was not vulnerable to attack as were coastal kingdoms like Makassar and Banten, or even an inland kingdom like Mataram. The Dutch could not march on Minangkabau. Neither could they stem the flow of envoys and letters from the Minangkabau hills. Minangkabau royal words, we shall see, became a source of empowerment to communities within and beyond Sumatra.

Since rebellions alerted and alarmed the colonial power, it is at such flash points that local activities are discussed in the records in more than usual depth. VOC records, in fact, reveal something of the process by which Minangkabau leadership could focus resistance to European power in a way which was effective beyond Minangkabau itself. In what follows two prominent Minangkabau insurgents will be considered with particular attention being given to the messages they conveyed, the language they used and the way in which their words were received in the archipelago. This will lead to a discussion of the semiotic world within which the messages circulated - of the "authority of the sign" in seventeenth century Malay societies - and ultimately to a broader consideration of the impact of Minangkabau messages in the eighteenth century.

Anti-Dutch rebellions in the archipelago during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries have been discussed by several historians. Anthony Reid sees in



these revolts the "death throes" of an age of commerce in which absolutist monarchies organized and controlled Southeast Asia's maritime trade. The rebellions represented, he suggests, a "last gasp" Islamic reaction to increasing VOC dominance over local commerce and, by the late seventeenth century, a retreat from state power to a more "marginal" expression of religious resistance.<sup>1</sup> In an influential article on this subject J. Kathirithamby-Wells has argued that a virtual holy war was fought against the VOC in the late seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Both scholars quite properly locate the rebellions in the context of the VOC practice of monopoly trading, the use of force and the co-option of local rulers. As Verspreet said of the dissident Minangkabau merchant Nakoda Marabat in 1667, he resented the Company for ruining the "celebrated old Malay seafaring".<sup>3</sup> And the Raja Dua Celas, too, told the Minangkabau court of their resentment that the Dutch Company had destroyed the coastal regions.<sup>4</sup> There is a tendency, however, for historians to depict the spiritual impetus of these revolts as an alternative avenue for suppressed political expression.<sup>5</sup> But religion and politics were not by any means distinct categories in pre-19th Southeast Asian societies.

While not denying the profoundly political nature of anti-Dutch agitation, and the broad aspirations of its leaders to forge an Islamic unity against the Dutch,

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, vol. 2 (forthcoming, 1993), Chapter Five.

<sup>2</sup> J. Kathirithamby-Wells, "Ahmad Shah Ibn Iskander and the late 17th Century 'Holy War' in Indonesia", *JMBRAS*, vol. 43, 1 (July 1970), pp. 48-64.

<sup>3</sup> SWK 1668 VOC 1264 f. 275r. See Chapter Four.

<sup>4</sup> SWK 1687, VOC 1428, ff. 589r-590v.

<sup>5</sup> As Kathirithamby-Wells sees it, "Local rivalries amongst chiefs and rulers...continued to persist, often with the VOC as a partisan, so that grievances could not find a direct political expression. Instead they found an outlet in some semblance of Islamic unity generated by anti-Kafir propaganda by religious representatives...". "Ahmad Shah Ibn Iskander", pp. 48-9.

attention in this chapter will be given less to the success or failure of anti-Dutch resistance than to the communicative process itself. In the interior of Jambi, in north east Sumatra, on the Malay Peninsula and across the archipelago Minangkabau networks were active and messages and letters circulated. This culture of communication is vital for an understanding of the nature of Minangkabau royal authority in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Within the network of messages and signs we may detect the development of a local discourse of power which, in the face of European hegemony, was fashioned into a language of resistance.

Seventeenth century Dutchmen were becoming aware of that process. In spite of the contempt with which they regarded Minangkabau rhetoric it is possible to detect, below the official language of VOC reports, a sense of threat, and a fear of a local world of subversive messages, letters and symbols circulating within and between local societies. One way of approaching these issues is to examine how royal words were broadcast in the *rantau* regions and how Minangkabau rhetoric could empower local communities.

### Raja Ibrahim

Royal promises of divine mediation offered, however briefly, the promise of an earthly vehicle for the spiritual power which men believed could change the world. This is illustrated in a 17th century Minangkabau rebellion on the Malay Peninsula. In 1677 the Minangkabau population of Naning, Rembau and Sungai Ujung joined forces to attack Melaka.<sup>6</sup> They were led by an aspiring Minangkabau king. The then

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<sup>6</sup> As a group which was distinguished from the surrounding Malay population Minangkabaus were first noticed in Portuguese times, see for instance Cortesão, *Suma Oriental*, II p. 268; and G. de Eredia, "Description", *JMBRAS*, Vol. VIII, 1 (1930), pp. 22-3. The development of this *rantau* community is discussed in M. Naim, *Merantau: Minangkabau voluntary Migration*, Unpublished PhD thesis University of Singapore, 1972, Chapter Three.

Governor of Melaka, Balthasar Bort, reported that it was believed by the local population that this king could perform miracles,

that he could poison the wind and make it blow wherever he willed in order to do men to death, bewitch canon and firearms so that they could not be fired, harden his warriors to such a degree that they could not be wounded, much less killed by our troops, that he himself could change his shape three times a day and even make himself invisible, and other absurdities of the same sort.

An impressive force, rumoured to number 3,700 Minangkabaus and Orang Laut, was beaten off in a surprise attack on Melaka which was led by their "elected king".<sup>7</sup>

An examination of contemporary Dutch reports offers some insights into the messages which Raja Ibrahim brought to the local Minangkabau population on the Peninsula, his reception and the communicative world within which these messages flowed. Early Dutch accounts described Raja Ibrahim as being descended from the "the Minangkabau king", although they give no precise details of his origins and later reports state that he was an imposter.<sup>8</sup> By whatever the means by which Raja Ibrahim came to be on the Peninsula, he appears to have been able to use his Minangkabau royal claims and the sacred power of Minangkabau sovereignty to give voice and focus to the material concerns of local Minangkabaus.

Friction between the Minangkabau communities and Melaka had existed since Portuguese times and continued well into the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> In particular the Minangkabau population resented taxes which a Portuguese appointed Temenggong

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<sup>7</sup> "Report of the Governor Balthasar Bort on Malacca", *JMBRAS*, vol. 5, 1 (1927), p. 69. These events have been noted in outline by several historians. The rebellion has been cited as an example of a resurgence of Minangkabau confidence and energy in the late seventeenth century (L. Andaya, *Kingdom of Johor*, p. 109-13) and of the development of an Islamic based anti-Kafir movement in the archipelago, Kathirithamby-Wells, "Ahmad Shah ibn Iskandar", p. 50.

<sup>8</sup> Two slightly different accounts of Raja Ibrahim's antecedents and arrival on the Peninsula can be found in Melaka 1678 VOC 1328, f. 132r and Bort, "Report", p. 69. There are some suggestions in the Dutch records that the ruler of Kuantan was involved in the uprising, see note 20 below.

<sup>9</sup> See Diogo do Couto, quoted in R. Cardon, "A Malay Tradition", *JMBRAS*, Vol. XVIII, 2 (1940), p. 110, p. 117.

placed upon them. The Melaka river was even barred at night to make sure that no untaxed trade took place.<sup>10</sup> These difficulties continued after the Dutch conquest and between 1641-5 there were widespread disturbances with a Dutch force eventually marching inland to destroy the Naning settlement. Trading restrictions placed upon Naning and Rembau in the aftermath of these events were still in force in 1677 and, significantly, it was with a complaint about these restrictions that Raja Ibrahim first announced himself to the Dutch.<sup>11</sup>

This is an important point. VOC reports tend to emphasise the "magical" and "fanatical" nature of anti-Dutch rebellions, but, like the Rajas Dua Celas, and like other Minangkabau "rebels" discussed below, Raja Ibrahim's followers were concerned with practical issues. In his report on Melaka Balthasar Bort notes that the people of Rembau and Naning often pleaded that they were unable to pay the Company its tithe on their crops because of poverty and "bad crops and dear rice".<sup>12</sup> Raja Ibrahim prophesied that, if they followed him, they would have a good rice harvest.<sup>13</sup>

The making of such a prophecy was significant. Power over harvests and crops was a Minangkabau royal claim which resonated with local people. Minangkabau *surat cap* claimed that those who disobeyed the commands of the ruler would be struck by

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>11</sup> According to Bort, Raja Ibrahim sent a letter to the Dutch which they received on the 11th March 1677 in which he made "false complaints that his people were interfered with by our patrols in the Straits, when bringing their vessels to Malacca, in defiance of the old contracts; demanding that henceforth these contracts should be better observed", Bort, "Report", p. 69, see also Melaka 1678 VOC 1328, f. 312 v.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. According to Bort's own account, "this happened in 1675, 1676 and 1677". In general Bort's report tends to blame the revolt on what he describes as Minangkabau perfidy. He was disingenuous about its possible causes, referring to the attack as a "surprise" and stating that, in the period of peace between 1647 and 1677, the Minangkabaus had "prospered and multiplied and,... having therefore waxed proud and arrogant" had joined with the people of Sungai Ujung to attack Melaka.

<sup>13</sup> Melaka 1679 VOC 1339, f. 554r. According to a Makassarese who returned from Rembau in 1678, the people there turned away from Raja Ibrahim when his promise of a good harvest was not fulfilled.

the *besi kawi* and that their *padi* and other crops would die, and we have several accounts which suggest that this was believed. Marsden, for instance mentioned the belief amongst the Bataks that their "affairs would never prosper - that their *padi* would be blighted, their buffaloes die and that they would remain under a kind of spell - if they offended those sacred messengers."<sup>14</sup>

Dutch sources do not mention whether Raja Ibrahim brought with him a credential or *surat cap*, but we know that he advanced claims which fitted him to be chosen as a Minangkabau king and that, in a letter he wrote to the Dutch, he used "exalted titles and dignities". Bort described this letter with its "bombastic, high titles and honours" as "hypocritical". On first receiving it Bort and his colleagues "judged by the tenor of the letter that it had been written to the order of a presumptuous, insolent madman".<sup>15</sup>

Bort's reaction to the letter, and his conclusion that its author must be mad, mirrors the bewilderment of observers such as Marsden. Moreover Raja Ibrahim is said to have proclaimed his "wonderful holiness" and his power to bring about "rare miracles and magic".<sup>16</sup> Thus, while we cannot be sure that Raja Ibrahim used a *surat cap* to establish his credentials on the peninsula, we do know that he used a similar style when writing to the Dutch, and in all probability this was derived from the *surat cap* conventions.

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<sup>14</sup> Marsden, *The History of Sumatra*, p. 376.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 69. The seal which Raja Ibrahim used upon his letter, Bort claimed, was "mean, slovenly and contemptible". In Bort's report Raja Ibrahim is depicted as a "turbulent" priest who had stirred up an otherwise peaceful group into "treachery" with his "insolent", "presumptuous", "mad" discourse. Bort, "Report" pages 69, 70 and 74. Bort described Raja Ibrahim as "a fugitive Mohammedan priest" who had been thrown out of Sumatra and reported that he dressed "as a Muslim pope". Indeed when Raja Ibrahim first announced himself to the Dutch in Melaka he declared his intention of travelling to Mecca on the Hajj. Bort, "Report", p. 69 and Melaka 1678 VOC 1328, f. 312r. Rumours of Raja Ibrahim's special powers had already "infected" the "superstitious black Roman Catholics and other silly, credulous people" Bort wrote. Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>16</sup> Dagh-Register, vol. 25 (1677), p. 213.



The impact of Raja Ibrahim's rhetoric among local Minangkabaus, his proclamation of his "wonderful holiness" and his claim to be able to bring about "rare miracles and magic", is illustrated by the brick wall reaction which Bort encountered when he tried to question Raja Ibrahim's credentials and to limit the risk of contagion which Raja Ibrahim posed. Bort sent a letter to Melaka's vassals, the Minangkabau of Naning, warning them to "give neither heed nor bearing to this imposter" if he appeared among them. Raja Ibrahim's rhetoric was evidently more potent than that of Bort, however. When the Governor's envoys managed with difficulty to reach Naning, Raja Merah, the previously loyal chief *panghulu*, "would not accept our letter except in the presence of the elected king". Raja Ibrahim's response was to declare war on Melaka, sending no reply to Bort.<sup>17</sup>

In the attack on Melaka which followed, the Dutch defences were sufficient to withstand the Minangkabau onslaught. Initially Bort reported that Ibrahim had been killed "in all his fine habiliments", although this was later contradicted.<sup>18</sup> In a letter of July 1677, Bort reported that Raja Ibrahim was in Rembau. It was said that Raja Ibrahim, himself, could see the futility of attacking Melaka and would willingly have resigned the attempt. He was dissuaded, however, by the Minangkabaus who would not let him go and who wanted to keep him in their vicinity in order to help them.<sup>19</sup> This report, based as it must have been on hearsay and passed down to us through the veils of translation and cultural difference, nevertheless suggests something of the talismanic quality that prestigious individuals, brandishing claims to Minangkabau

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<sup>17</sup> Bort, "Report", pp. 70-1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 73. Ibrahim's death in 1679 is mentioned in a later report, Melaka 1679 VOC 1339, f. 568r.

<sup>19</sup> Melaka 1678 VOC 1328, f.339 r. In the report of Ibrahim's death from 1679 it was said that he was killed in Rembau because he wanted to carry on with the anti-Dutch struggle while the people wished to restore peace.

sovereignty, must have had for beleaguered groups of Minangkabau Malays who found their trade and livelihood constrained by the VOC.

However short-lived this seventeenth century uprising was, it was not carried out in isolation. The Sultan of Banten was said to have been involved and the Minangkabau Sultan of Kuantan was in communication with the rebels.<sup>20</sup> Raja Ibrahim also wrote to the "Great Haji" and all the Bugis and Makassarrese in Kelang (Selangor) urging them to join a holy war against the Dutch.<sup>21</sup> This request was ignored but the rebels did receive Sumatran support with ships from Bengkalis delivering rice to the Penagie river, to assist the insurgents inland.<sup>22</sup> Rumours were said to be rife among the Minangkabau communities on both sides of the Straits and Dutch ships and crews visiting Bengkalis learned that the people there had heard of the attack on Melaka and believed it to have been successful.

These rumours and secret communications give a hint of the range of subversive messages circulating in the Minangkabau world. For further examples we may turn to the activities of the famous Minangkabau anti-Dutch fighter Ahmad Syah Ibn Iskander or Yang Dipertuan Raja Sakti as he was also known.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> J. K. J. de Jonge (ed.), *De Opkomst van het Nederlandsch Gezag in Oost-Indie Java*, 's Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1873, vol. 4, p. cxvii. One report in the *Dagh-Register* from July 1677 notes that Raja Ibrahim originated from the Minangkabau kings on the east coast of Sumatra and it may even be that he travelled to the Peninsula with the knowledge of the Minangkabau ruler of Kuantan who was at war with Inderagiri and sought to strengthen his support by calling back a number of Minangkabau *merantau* families from Java, *Dagh-Register*, vol. 25 (1677), p. 213 and Melaka 1678 VOC 1328, f. 349r.

<sup>21</sup> In his letter Raja Ibrahim is said to have exhorted them to join the anti-Dutch struggle which, he wrote, was the responsibility of all Muslims. Anyone who came to die thereby would go straight to heaven, Ibrahim claimed, where they would live as though they were still mortal, Melaka 1679 VOC 1339, f. 556., also cited in L. Andaya, *Kingdom of Johor*, p. 113.

<sup>22</sup> Melaka 1679 VOC 1339, f 540r. and f. 554r.

<sup>23</sup> Ahmad Syah ibn Iskandar is most commonly referred to as "Jang de Pertuan" in VOC sources. His own letters were said to come from "Seri Sultan Ahmad Syah" and were stamped with a seal which read "Paduka Seri Sultan ibn Dzurriet Iskandar Dzulkarnain". De Jonge, *Opkomst*, vol. VII, p. 40-1.

## Raja Sakti

Yang Dipertuan Raja Sakti claimed descent from Minangkabau kings and was recognised and acknowledged as such by his followers. He called himself *ibn*, or son of, Iskandar by right of his Minangkabau royal origins. Historians have found his precise relationship with the royal house hard to determine, but in Chapter Five it was suggested that the leader, who alarmed the Dutch when he appeared in Belitung, in 1686, with three hundred ships and 4,000 men,<sup>24</sup> may well have been one of the nephews of the later Sultan Ahmad Syah of Minangkabau.<sup>25</sup>

The chronology and scope of Raja Sakti's anti-Dutch campaign has already been outlined by Kathirithamby-Wells. One of the striking things about Raja Sakti's career is the extent to which he was able to threaten the VOC without directly confronting them. He rallied support at Belitung, assembling a force of ships and men, then he moved to the Lampungs where he was pursued by a combined force of VOC and Banten troops. From there Raja Sakti moved inland and travelled to Bengkulu where he remained under British patronage for a time and is said to have undermined the

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<sup>24</sup> The first report of Raja Sakti at Belitung in 1685 mentioned that he had five ships and a force of two hundred men with which he intended to lead an anti-Dutch campaign. He was described as the "Minangkabau Raja Yang Dipertuan", and was said to have been involved in discussions with the new king of Palembang, Pangeran Aria, Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. IV, pp. 757-8. By 1686 Ahmad Syah's following appears to have grown considerably, Netscher cites a report from the VOC records that he had accumulated 4,000 men and 300 vessels. E. Netscher, *De Nederlanders in Djohor en Siak 1602-1865*, Batavia: Bruining and Wijt, 1870, p. 57.

<sup>25</sup> The Minangkabau prince who wrote to Melaka, Batavia, Padang and Palembang as Ahmad Syah between 1679-80 (see Chapter Five above) made resonant claims to recognition as ruler of Minangkabau, but he was already showing signs of disillusionment with the VOC. He disappears from the Dutch records after 1680 and it seems plausible to suggest that he may have left home to travel through the archipelago, following the pattern of many Minangkabau *merantau*, and also that of the prestigious leaders in Sumatran literature who gained spiritual strength and insight from their travels. Departure from home and travel in search of *ilmu* (knowledge) is a convention in pre-modern Malay texts from Sumatra, it occurs in the *Siak Chronicles*, the *Hikayat Deli* and two texts from Barus in north Sumatra, see Drakard, *A Malay Frontier*, p. 127 n.93.

pro-Dutch Sultan of Banten's authority in Silebar, attacking a Banten force there. From Bengkulu he moved back and forth between various Sumatran centres and later became involved in dissent at Menjuto, Jambi and Palembang until he disappears from the records in 1695.<sup>26</sup> Arguably, Raja Sakti's subversive power lay not in any one major victory against his opponents; it lay in his mobility, his capacity to tap local dissent and to win followers. Above all, it lay in his communicative and "networking" activities and in the language he used.

The impact of Raja Sakti's messages was felt throughout the archipelago and Dutch records from this period are full of complaints about him.<sup>27</sup> He achieved this impact by writing letters which offered an alternative to Dutch rule and a means for locals to empower themselves against an unjust and alien force. From Belitung Raja Sakti wrote to Siam, Ceribon, Aceh, west Sumatra, Borneo and Mataram.<sup>28</sup> We know that his letters reached the Raja of Bone in Makassar who was disturbed by their message, and also Bima and Ambon where they influenced the population.<sup>29</sup> The Paduka Raja of Johor received messages from Raja Sakti as did the ruler of Terengganu.<sup>30</sup> Raja Sakti's envoys were also thought to be in touch with other well known anti-Dutch rebels such as Surapati and the former Dutch soldier, Captain

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<sup>26</sup> See Kathirithamby-Wells, "Ahmad Shah ibn Iskandar", *passim*.

<sup>27</sup> To the VOC he was a "vagrant" or "vagabond" ("*lantloper*"), see Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. V (1690), p. 357-8.

<sup>28</sup> N. Macleod, "De Oost-Indische Compagnie op Sumatra in de 17e eeuw", *I.G.*, vol. 1 (1906), p. 794, cited in Kathirithamby-wells, "Ahmad Shah ibn Iskandar", p. 55. Some of these letters are mentioned retrospectively in a report from 1688. See Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. V (1688), p. 190.

<sup>29</sup> Bone and Bima are mentioned in Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. V (1686), p. 34. Raja Sakti's influence on Ambon is referred to in the same volume of the *Generale Missiven*, p. 100.

<sup>30</sup> This was recorded by the Dutch in a conversation with the Paduka Raja cited by L. Andaya, *The Kingdom of Johor*, p. 149.

Jonker.<sup>31</sup>

On several occasions the VOC managed to intercept Raja Sakti's letters and we therefore know more about these than about communications from Raja Ibrahim on the Peninsula. At Tulang Bawang in the Lampungs Company forces came upon a cache of letters written to various rulers in the archipelago in which he predicted the end of the world and encouraged them to restore the Islamic faith.<sup>32</sup> According to Dutch reports these made "conceited" and "fanciful" claims to be able not only to create rice, like Raja Ibrahim, but also to bring on thunder and lightning and to have the power to make himself invisible.<sup>33</sup> In 1687 the VOC came across more "bestial letters" from Raja Sakti and uncovered a secret correspondence with a Raja Bongsu, a "priester" from Pariaman.

Raja Bongsu lamented his fate to be "under the government of other men" and offered his "body and soul" to Raja Sakti with the assurance that he and all other

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<sup>31</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells, "Ahmad Shah ibn Iskandar", p. 55. Ann Kumar makes no mention of possible contact between Raja Sakti and Surapati in her *Surapati Man and Legend*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976. Kathirithamby-Wells (Ibid., p. 62) considers that actual contact between Raja Sakti and Captain Jonker was unlikely since the latter worked for the VOC prior to 1689. It is possible, however, that the latter may have established west Sumatran connections during his period as Panglima of Paraiman in the 1660's (see Chapter Three above). On Dutch perceptions of the relationship between Raja Sakti and Captain Jonker see Ricklefs, *War, Culture and Economy in Java*, pp. 105-6.

<sup>32</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. V (1687) p. 79. According to the Governor General's report Arung Palaka, the ruler of Bone, asked a Dutch representative whether it was true that the world would soon come to an end. Arung Palaka declared his loyalty to the Company, but it puzzled Dutch officials that he corresponded with the Pangeran Aria of Jambi, an ally of Raja Sakti. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. V, pp. 8-9 and p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> Ahmad Syah ibn Iskandar's powers are mentioned in Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. V (1687) p. 92. This parallel with the claims made by Raja Ibrahim on the Peninsula and the fact that Ahmad Syah was sometimes referred to as Raja Ibrahim leaves open the faint possibility that these two were one and the same. For a reference to the Raja Sakti's alternative name of Raja Ibrahim see Netscher's account based on VOC records, *De Nederlanders*, p. 57. According to this account the Raja Sakti was a son of the Minangkabau royal house who had left Minangkabau three years before. In his own letters Raja Sakti recounts that he had wandered through the archipelago for seven years.

Muslims were awaiting "his majesty's orders".<sup>34</sup> Yet more letters from Raja Sakti were intercepted in 1690 when he joined other dissidents at Muara Tebo in the hinterland of Jambi. From there he sent envoys to the Dutch ally Pangeran Probo of Jambi with a "very bumptious" official letter announcing his arrival, while secretly the envoys also brought letters intended for local eyes in which he encouraged them to rise up against the VOC. These seditious letters were publicly burnt while the envoys were imprisoned and executed.<sup>35</sup>

What did these letters say? And what was it about Raja Sakti's words which had such a subversive impact? There is some evidence available on which to attempt an answer to these questions. At least two of Raja Sakti's subversive letters escaped the flames and have come down to us in Dutch translation. One was written to Amangkurat II, the Susuhunan of Mataram in 1686 and the other was captured by the VOC in Makassar, but appears to have been intended originally for circulation in Sumatra.<sup>36</sup> The fact that we only have access to these letters in Dutch translation is, of course, a barrier to analysing their language. Nevertheless, these texts warrant attention for what they reveal about the conceptual grounds for anti-Dutch dissent in the archipelago and the basis for Raja Sakti's leadership and support. These letters also help us to understand the unity of "religion" and "politics" in Raja Sakti's discourse and the role and appeal of Minangkabau kingship in this formula.

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<sup>34</sup> Raja Bongsu was executed at Batavia for writing this letter. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. V (1687) pp. 119-23 and p. 152. See also Kathirithamby-Wells, "Ahmad Shah ibn Iskandar", p. 60 who cites de Jonge, *Opkomst*, vol VIII, p. 43. The text of Raja Bongsu's letter can be found in VOC 1431 f. 643.

<sup>35</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. V (1690), pp. 357-8.

<sup>36</sup> These are both available in published form: the letter to the Susuhunan is contained in de Jonge, *Opkomst*, vol. VIII, pp. 39-41 and the Sumatran letter can be found in the nineteenth century three volume edition of Valentijn's *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien*, ed. S. Keijzer, The Hague: H. C. Susan: 1858, vol. 1, pp. 3-5. The letter transcribed by Valentijn lists a number of places in central Sumatra. Not all of these are identifiable but the list includes Sungai Rembang, Payakumbuh, Taram, Tebingtinggi and Gunung Ambacang. Ahmad Syah commands all his servants who stand under the *panghulu* of these lands to acknowledge his letter.

The structure of the two letters is similar. They open with an almost identical section devoted to praise of Iskandar Zulkarnain. They then proceed by establishing Iskandar's status as an intermediary between God and mankind, then linking Raja Sakti to Iskandar by means of his Minangkabau descent. Following this, the letters turn outwards to current conditions and call for a restoration of Islamic purity by overcoming the Dutch. The resemblance between these letters and the Minangkabau *surat cap* genre is obvious. There are notable similarities in content, including some of the same stories about Iskandar, the brotherhood of the three world rulers of Rum, China and Pagaruyung, and reference to key items of the Minangkabau royal regalia.

In Raja Sakti's letters, as in Minangkabau *surat cap*, Iskandar functions as a device for linking man and God. The opening section of the letters discusses Iskandar's title, Zulkarnain, and the idea that this was derived from his dual functions as king and prophet.<sup>37</sup> Iskandar was a prophet because Gabriel made divine disclosures to him, and a king in his capacity as God's *stadhouder* in this world. Iskandar's world-encompassing exploits are mentioned and his attributes are then listed. These link him with God and establish an almost divine quality. He is

The great Sultan and holy king, possessed of honour and the seal of upright orthodoxy, the proxy of the great God, following the path of belief, expounder and defender of the true word and of the true knowledge, frugal, pious and helper of the wronged, comfort of the weak and poor, God's priest, shadow of magnanimity and goodness, he who raises the standard and whose strength and victory in battle is blessed by the mediation of the prophet and all his companions, Amen.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The letters explain that the title is said by some to derive from his two horns, by others to refer to the two kingdoms he inherited from his parents and by others again to be due to his dual functions as king and prophet.

<sup>38</sup> De Jonge, *Opkomst*, pp. 39-41 and Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw*, pp. 3-4. This translation glosses over a couple of difficulties. Regarding the first two lines of the quotation, the de Jonge text reads "... bezitter van eer, regtsinnig, versegelt, opregt, volmaakt voor den grooten God", while the Valentijn version reads "bezitter van een regtzinning volk, verzegeld, opregt, volmaakt voor den grooten God". The phrase "possessed of honour and the seal of upright orthodoxy" is therefore my own reading of the text's intentions. In particular I have translated "regtzinning" as "orthodoxy" with some reservations. "Volmaakt" is also problematic and

Immediately after this statement Seri Sultan Ahmad Syah (Raja Sakti) is introduced, who, it is said, "comes from the lineage of Iskandar Zulkarnain" and who is said to possess the kamat wood, the gold Jati-Jati, the crown, the throne and the loom which moves once a year. This immediate juxtaposition of Iskandar Zulkarnain and Raja Sakti does more than assert the latter's descent from Iskandar. It also establishes a contiguity between them in which Raja Sakti is associated with Iskandar's attributes. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition this associative pattern would be described as figural interpretation, and it functions to establish a connection

between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfils the first.<sup>39</sup>

In this case, as in many Biblical analogies, Raja Sakti and Iskandar are linked to each other vertically by divine providence.<sup>40</sup> Thus Raja Sakti partook of Iskandar Zulkarnain's protective role as standard bearer and defender of the true word and the true knowledge. The qualities attributed to Iskandar are those of magnanimous ruler, a defender of his people, and this was precisely the role assumed by Raja Sakti in his anti-Dutch campaign.

The significance of this passage for Raja Sakti's figuration as a defender of the faith appears to be confirmed by its absence in another, public, letter which Raja Sakti sent to Pangeran Purba and which was intended to be read by the Dutch. Here the opening description of Iskandar's exploits is identical with the de Jonge and Valentijn letters, but the crucial passage quoted above, in which Iskandar is depicted as

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strictly it should be translated as "faultless" or "perfect", I have assumed, however, that the intention here is "volmacht" - "power of attorney" or "proxy". The Dutch text in both letters includes "enz" or "etc" after the reference to battles or "oorlogen".

<sup>39</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, translated by W. R. Trask, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974, p. 73.

<sup>40</sup> As opposed to a linkage on a horizontal, temporal, plane, see Auerbach, *Mimesis*, pp. 73-4. As an example of biblical prefiguration on a vertical, or divine plane, Auerbach cites the sacrifice of Isaac which prefigures the sacrifice of Christ.



protector of the community and defender of the faith, is missing.<sup>41</sup> After introducing Raja Sakti, the letter to Pangeran Purba goes on to announce his intention to visit Jambi, whereas the two anti-Dutch letters call upon Raja Sakti's supporters to drive out the Europeans. Raja Sakti's Minangkabau royal status is central to the way in which this message is framed: his descent from Iskandar Zulkarnain provides him with a link to God and a direct connection with the forces of creation and apocalypse.

This is demonstrated in the letter transcribed by de Jonge and intended for circulation in Sumatra. Here Raja Sakti commands obedience from his subjects and informs them of the prophecy that the world would last seven thousand years and that the kingdom of the three brother rulers of Rum, China and Pagaruyung would be restored three times. This prophecy was about to be fulfilled as was demonstrated, the letter said, by the weaving which belonged to Raja Sakti's ancestors and which was coeval with the age of the earth. This would appear to be an obvious reference to the weaving or loom known as *Sangsita Kala* which is mentioned in all Minangkabau *surat cap* and was one of the central items of Minangkabau *kebesaran*. Only a small piece of this weaving remained, the letter said, and this was a sign that the day of judgment was near, just as the Minangkabau kingdom was now reduced from its former greatness.<sup>42</sup>

Raja Sakti's letter to the Susuhunan does not mention this millenarian theme, but his communication with Mataram does provide us with an example of the way in which Raja Sakti's words were received in the archipelago since, in this instance, the

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<sup>41</sup> The letter to Pangeran Purba is held in the VOC archive among the *Overgekomen Brieven* from Jambi 1691 VOC 1485, ff. 75-78. My thanks to Barbara Andaya for first drawing my attention to this letter.

<sup>42</sup> De Jonge, *Opkomst*, pp. 39-41. Ahmad Syah himself, the letter stated, had travelled outside Minangkabau for seven years until God moved him to return to his father in Minangkabau, and after thirteen years to go back to sea, in order to follow God's orders and to drive out the Hollanders.

VOC managed to capture both sides of the correspondence. Raja Sakti's letter asks for God's blessing and protection for the Susuhunan whom he addresses as his son. The letter states that Raja Sakti had heard that the Susuhunan had fought with the Dutch and encourages him in this, asking him to prepare the people of Madura for Raja Sakti's arrival.<sup>43</sup> The Susuhunan's reply is remarkable for the terms in which Raja Sakti was addressed by the ruler of Mataram.

The Susuhunan appears to have spoken "up" to Raja Sakti, addressing him as a senior.

Your grandson, the Soesoehoenan Ratoe Amangkoerat Sinapati Ingalaga of the land of Meza Java, sends his humble greetings to his grandfather, Padoeka, the great Sultan of Pagar Roejong, who possesses the land of Maningcabo which is favoured by our lord, that munificent king who is blessed by the intercession of our Prophet, Mohhammed, the envoy of God.<sup>44</sup>

The Susuhunan asked for help from Raja Sakti because his land was in "great torment", wreaked by the "Hollandsche Christenen".<sup>45</sup> In a second letter the Susuhunan described the "grievous state" of his kingdom and said that he was turning to Raja Sakti since he was assured "that there is no more powerful Sultan to be found". Therefore he bowed "reverently before the great Sultan of Minangkabau since we share the Islamic faith".<sup>46</sup>

The expressions of respect for Raja Sakti contained in these letters, and in a

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<sup>43</sup> De Jonge, *Opkomst*, pp. 39-41. Raja Sakti's letter was probably sent shortly before the Dutch officer, Francois Tack was killed at the Mataram court and the VOC intercepted a reply from the Susuhunan and Pangeran Dipati Amiran Kasuma on the 17th February, 1686, nine days after Tack's death. These letters have been transcribed by Valentijn in *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien*, Dordrecht and Amsterdam: J. van Bram, 1724-6, vol. V, 1st Chapter VII, pp. 141-5. In the VOC archives the letters can be found among the Overgekomen Brieven from Ceribon 1686 VOC 1430, ff. 1823-5. The Dutch suspected that the Susuhunan and Raja Sakti had been in touch prior to Tack's death and had planned the attack, although this was not proven.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143-4.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144 and see also the Overgekomen Brieven of the VOC, Ceribon 1686 VOC 1430, ff. 1823-4. The last quotation here is taken from the manuscript source which differs slightly from Valentijn's rendering.

third from the Pangeran Dipati Amirang Casuma, must be read in the context of Amangkurat II's struggle against the VOC and his search for support.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, in view of the importance of status distinctions in Javanese culture, the Susuhunan's fulsome recognition of, and respect for, Raja Sakti requires some additional explanation. Amangkurat II's submission appears to reflect the prestige surrounding the Minangkabau kingdom and the ruler's links with Iskandar. In particular it points to a key element in Raja Sakti's appeal, his divine inheritance and his role as a representative of God. Raja Sakti, the Susuhunan said, was "as if holy".<sup>48</sup> We do not know what local term was used here, but the idea of Raja Sakti's holiness is consistent with the title Raja Sakti, itself, which implies a ruler with supernatural power.<sup>49</sup> The statement helps us to understand how Raja Sakti, and others like him, were regarded as embodying a concentration of spiritual power which placed them outside an everyday political order.

On the Peninsula Raja Ibrahim presented his spiritual claims in person. We do not know whether he carried "proofs" of his identity in the form of credentials, but his rhetoric had much in common with that of other Minangkabau princes. His presence, we have noted, had a talismanic quality. Raja Sakti, we know, used letters and other signs to represent himself throughout the archipelago. These signs appear to have had a similar impact to Raja Ibrahim's presence. They were treated as powerful objects in themselves, as in Sumbawa where a letter, flag and water (probably consecrated) sent

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<sup>47</sup> The Pangeran Dipati's letter is transcribed by Valentijn and also found in Ceribon 1686 VOC 1430, ff. 1823-4. A description of Mataram's struggle against the VOC in this period can be found in Ricklefs, *War, Culture and Economy in Java*.

<sup>48</sup> "Als heilig". Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw*, vol. III, p. 144.

<sup>49</sup> If, as seems likely, the Susuhunan's letter was written in Malay the terms used might have been "alim", "karamat" or "sakti".

by Raja Sakti were treated with "uncommon honour".<sup>50</sup> This representation of authority in words and signs which were themselves authoritative was similar to the way in which Minangkabau kings represented themselves on the *rantau* in *surat cap* carried by royal envoys. A series of encapsulations took place in both cases. Royal words represented the raja who represented Iskandar Zulkarnain who represented God. That letters could encapsulate, and, it seems, virtually embody, these connections was due, perhaps, to what might be termed the "authority of the sign" in contemporary Malay society.

### The Authority of the Sign

VOC records offer us some insights into the importance of signs, or *tanda*, in the Minangkabau Malay world of the seventeenth century. They suggest the presence of a tendency to embody meaning in material form.

When the ruler of Minangkabau recognized Jacob Pits as his deputy on the west coast he invested him not only with the title Orangkaya Panglima Cahaya Raja, or "lustre of the Raja", but also with signs of greatness, an umbrella and a pike. These *tanda kebesaran*, together with a Minangkabau royal seal, empowered Pits as a royal representative or *ganti* on the west coast.<sup>51</sup> In this case the Minangkabau ruler was clearly investing Pits with objects which would convey royal power. In 1691 Seri Pada Muda, Sultan of Pagaruyung, wrote to the Governor of Melaka in 1691 to announce that he was sending his son to the coast with a sign (*teeken*) that the king was descended from Iskandar Zulkarnain and so that the Dutch would know that this was

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<sup>50</sup> Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw*, vol. III, p. 141.

<sup>51</sup> *Dagh Register*, vol. 18 and VOC 1271, f. 1038v

his son.<sup>52</sup>

*Tanda* were also used in more mundane contexts to attest individual status or embody relationships and compacts. Thus when the pro-Dutch Siri Raja Ulubelang faced opposition from his fellow *panghulu* in Kota Tengah in 1668, and appealed to the Padang Council for help, he was sent a diamond and ruby ring as a *teeken* (sign, or in Malay *tanda*), intended apparently to authorize his position.<sup>53</sup> Rings were often used by envoys as credentials and letters between Minangkabau kings and the Dutch frequently refer to the sending, or apologise for failing to send, accompanying signs known as *tanda mati*, or tokens.<sup>54</sup> In a later period *tanda* were also exchanged during hostilities, usually involving payment to one party as a "token of war".<sup>55</sup>

It was common to use rings as *tanda* to mark compacts and oaths. When an agreement was made between the VOC and the *panghulu* of Tiku in 1662, rings were exchanged in a solemn formula of affirmation made "according to old custom". The VOC representative received a diamond ring while the local chief *panghulu* was given a diamond ring in return.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, in 1669, when Raja di Hilir and Khatib Muda travelled inland to represent the VOC's interests in the Minangkabau interior, the people of the 20 Kota insisted on a *teeken* from the envoys to mark their agreement to

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<sup>52</sup> Melaka 1691 VOC 1498, f. 376v. The nature of the sign is not specified.

<sup>53</sup> *Dagh Register*, vol. 18, p. 278.

<sup>54</sup> For an example of a ring used as credential see SWK 1687 VOC 1428, f. 516. The Dutch letters refer to token of friendship variously as "Oog ciersel" (see, for instance SWK 1703 VOC 1664, f. 87 and SWK 1723 VOC 1980, f. 79) or "tanda mata" (SWK 1717 VOC 1883, f. 29). Roorda van Eysinga translates "oogcirkel" as "bulat mata" - eyeball, and this appears to be a variation on the Malay term *tanda mata* meaning token, keepsake or souvenir, see Roorda van Eysinga, *Algemeen Hollandsch-Maleisch Woordenboek*, Leiden: Gualth. Kolff, 1877. In 1703 a ruler of Minangkabau sent a gold Kris, along with his letter to Melaka, "as a sign of my honourable intention", Melaka 1704 VOC 1677, f. 72.

<sup>55</sup> See E. Francis, "Korte Beschrijving van de Nedelandschgrondgebied ter Westkust Sumatra 1837", *TNI*, vol. 2 (1839), p. 113 and Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 144.

<sup>56</sup> De Leeuw, *Het Painansch Contract*, p. 26.

bring gold to the coast and to ensure their safety.<sup>57</sup>

Letters of credential, such as that used by the Raja Dua Celas, were common and Raja Sakti, we have seen, distributed not only letters but also flags, water and other signs about which the Dutch sources give few details. The power invested in objects which were used as *tanda* is reflected in the appearance in 1710 of a silver plate on which was engraved a contract made between Sultan Kiai Gede' and the Pangeran Pringabaya of Jambi in 1698. This object was said to have been left behind in the interior of Jambi by Kiai Gede' in order that his person should be represented in the kingdom.<sup>58</sup>

The idea that the ruler's person, or *daulat*, could be represented by signs is not unfamiliar to students of Malay culture. Commentators frequently note, for instance, that items of royal regalia, such as the *nobat*, or royal orchestra, could embody *daulat*, the essence of sovereignty.<sup>59</sup> The notion that *kebesaran* such as the *nobat* embodied power has implications for the way in which we write about kingship and authority in the Malay world. There is a tendency in modern literature to use English words like "symbolize" or "legitimize" to express the link between the *alat-alat kerajaan* and royal authority. But these terms may not accurately capture the part played by *kebesaran* such as royal letters and regalia. They imply the existence of a remove or distance between the symbol and what is symbolized. That the relationship between signified

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<sup>57</sup> SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f. 1038v.

<sup>58</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VI, p. 766.

<sup>59</sup> The *nobat*, as Barbara Andaya points out, was "considered an essential element of kingship". More than this, "the *nobat* was credited with its own unique power, which were intimately linked to those of the ruler". *Abode of Grace*, pp. 271-2. The potency of these ideas can be demonstrated by reference to various incidents in Malay history where the possession of *nobat* and other regalia influenced the outcome of events. See L. Andaya, "Structure of Power in 12th Century Johor", p. 5. Winstedt writes of offerings of food and sacrifices to revive the regalia which are treated as being, themselves, receptacles of power. R.O. Winstedt, "Kingship and Enthronement in Malaya", *JMBRAS*, vol. 20, 1, (1947), pp.131.

and signifier in such cases may be more intimate than our language allows, is suggested by the absence of a vocabulary of "symbolism" in pre-modern Malay.

Modern words such as "legitimize" or "symbolize" have no direct equivalents in the language of Malay *hikayat*.<sup>60</sup> Searching for a language of representation in this literature we find that it is terms like *tanda* (sign, mark, emblem), or *alamat* (signal, sign), which come closest to conveying the English sense of "sign" or "symbol". An examination of the way in which these terms are used in some Malay texts suggests that *tanda* were connected to the thing they signified in a more substantial way than is implied by the English word "symbol".

At the end of the sixteenth century Frederick de Houtman gave *tanda* as an equivalent of the Dutch, "kerve oft teycken" (notch or mark), and of Malay *cap* (mark or sign).<sup>61</sup> This tangible value tends to be reflected in Malay texts themselves where the term *tanda* is often used not as "symbol" but rather in the sense of mark or evidence. In the *Sejarah Melayu*, for example, three princes descend to Bukit Seguntang where they are met by Wan Empok and Wan Malini who ask the princes to provide proof (*alamat*) of their claim to be descendants of Iskandar Zulkarnain. The brothers point to their crowns as the sign or proof (*tanda*) of their descent from Iskandar.<sup>62</sup> Similarly in the *Hikayat Banjar*, *tanda* are often used to prove or establish a connection between things. The royal crown is described as a sign (*tanda*)

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<sup>60</sup> Thus in modern Malay *simbol* is derived from English and terms such as *kesan* ("mark, track") or *lambang* (from Javanese) have been adapted for modern usage.

<sup>61</sup> Frederick de Houtman, *Le "Spraeck Ende Woord-Boek"*, edited by Denys Lombard, Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1970, p. 239. In modern Malay, *tanda* tends to take the sense of a mark as in *tanda tangan* (signature), *tanda bacaan* (diacritical marks), *tanda tempat* (landmark).

<sup>62</sup> *Sejarah Melayu: The Malay Annals*, Raffles MS. no. 18, R.O. Winstedt (ed.), JMBRAS, vol. 16, (1938), p. 55 and *Sejarah Melayu (Diusahkan by W.G. Shellabear)*, Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1975, p. 18. In the Raffles 18 text each prince wore a crown (Brown, p. 14). In Shellabear they brought one crown (Shellabear, p. 18).

of kingship. At one point in the text, where the correct fit of the crown is said to be a proof of royal descent, it is stated that "it is this crown which evinces the kingship of your descendants".<sup>63</sup> In the *Hikayat Banjar*, the *Hikayat Indraputra* and the *Misa Melayu*, *tanda* or *tanda alamat* are usually material objects which establish or prove a tangible link between things. These include the the royal crown<sup>64</sup>, sirih sent as a mark of betrothal (*tanda meminang*)<sup>65</sup>, Indraputra's belt as evidence of his death, a jacket as a sign of intentions and a magical arrow as a sign of supernatural power.<sup>66</sup>

Not surprisingly, perhaps, in royal chronicles like the *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Banjar*, there is a particular association between *tanda* and kingship. Thus *tanda kerajaan* (signs of kingship), *tanda kebesaran* (marks of greatness) and *tanda hormat* (marks of honour) are often detailed.<sup>67</sup> In addition two nineteenth century Sumatran texts reflect a picture very like that of the seventeenth century Dutch sources from west Sumatra, mentioning the use of *tanda* used to mark events such as war, death, friendship and agreements.<sup>68</sup> This profusion of *tanda* may have been linked to the necessity of marking and maintaining boundaries, including those of

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<sup>63</sup> "Maka mangkota inilah akan tanda anak tjutju tuan menjadi radja itu", Ras, *Hikajat Bandjar*, p. 318 line 1490, Ras's translation. In this text, as in others *tanda* is used in combination with *alamat*, a word derived from Arabic, which indicates "sign, signal, address".

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Raja Chulan, *Misa Melayu*, pp. 37 and 38, see also pages 39 and 41.

<sup>66</sup> Muljadi, *Hikayat Indraputra*, pages, 74, 149 and 185.

<sup>67</sup> This is noticeable in the *Hikayat Banjar*, and also in two texts from Barus in north west Sumatra, the *Asal Turunan Raja-Raja Barus* and the *Sejarah Tuanku Batu Badan*, see Ras, *Hikajat Bandjar*, p. 318 and Drakard (ed), *Sejarah Raja-Raja Barus*, pages 130, 147, 154, 196, 198 for references to *tanda* in the context of kingship. For a probable reference to *tanda daulat* see B.W. Andaya, "The Nature of the State in Eighteenth Century Perak", p. 23 n. 10.

<sup>68</sup> Drakard, *Sejarah Raja-Raja Barus*, pages 208, 224-5 and 228.



kinship and geography, which dominated the frontier society of west Sumatra.<sup>69</sup> *Tanda*, in other words, may have been particularly important in situations which involved cultural meetings and the passage of goods and people through distinct localities.<sup>70</sup> But the tendency towards embodying meaning in material form, in signs or *tanda*, was also marked in other parts of the Malay world.

A useful way of thinking about the impulse to concentrate meaning in objects might be, cautiously, to compare it with the perspective on Medieval Europe developed by Foucault and mentioned at the end of Chapter Six.<sup>71</sup> Foucault refers to a "complex of kinships, resemblances and affinities ... in which language and things were endlessly interwoven".<sup>72</sup> An aspect of this world of "resemblances" which other historians have commented upon was a tendency in Europe in the Middle Ages for

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<sup>69</sup> On the importance of cultural, economic and geographic frontiers in one part of west Sumatra see Drakard, *A Malay Frontier*, Chapter One and passim. One example of the way in which territorial boundaries were marked inland from Barus was with stone images called *penghulubelang*, which were regarded with awe (Ibid., p. 66.).

<sup>70</sup> As in the exchange of *tanda* between the VOC's envoys and the people of 20 Kota noted above. The exchange of gifts on entering new territory was part of the same process.

This link is also made by Ranajit Guha to whom I owe the phrase "authority of the sign". *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 37.

<sup>72</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p.54, Chapter Two and especially pp. 42-3. Foucault formulated this complex in terms of "similitudes" and "resemblances"; for his definition of these terms see pages 17-30 of *The Order of Things*. That Foucault summarises this world view rather than elaborating on it is due probably to the difficulty of describing a thousand years of European thought and to the complexity of language theory in the Middle Ages. Theresa Coletti points out that, from St. Augustine onwards, European thinkers were preoccupied with the problem of the referentiality of the sign and the existence of an ultimate truth in language which was derived from God. (*Naming the Rose: Eco Medieval Signs and Modern Theory*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988, pp. 21-2.) This was the world of intellectual enquiry. At the level of popular thought historians write of belief in the kind of connectedness between language and things which is suggested by Foucault, see Keith Thomas *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, London: Peregrine Books, 1985, pp. 27-57; and Carolly Erickson, *The Medieval Vision: Essays in History and Perception*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 8.

thought, and in particular religious thought, to embody itself in images.<sup>73</sup> In Renaissance Florence, Richard Trexler points out, "the idea of power in objects" was manifested in relics and in images, but most of all in the host.

The cult of the body of Christ validated one of the strongest religious tendencies: to give form to power on the principle that power was imputable to objects<sup>74</sup>

Historians, cautious of generalisation, will point to the uneven nature of the kind of epistemic shifts described by Foucault. Nevertheless his contrast between words (and, we might say, *tanda*) as a "mark of truth" in Medieval Europe, and words as a representation or translation of reality after the seventeenth century, may be illuminating for the Malay case.

What is suggested here is that language, and particularly royal and religious language, had, in certain contexts, a solidity in seventeenth century Sumatran thinking which was akin to the solidity and evidential truth of signs or *tanda*. Both came close to embodying the ideas they signified. Royal words, therefore, could be regarded as "marks of truth" encapsulating and embodying the word of God and be themselves evidential *tanda* or signs of God. Raja Sakti was regarded as a saint, and as such he was an embodiment and sign of God as were the words, the letters and other *tanda* which he broadcast through the archipelago. The context for this activity was a world in which the solidity and the authority of the sign was particularly marked and in which Raja Sakti could very easily be considered as though he were holy ("als heilig").

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<sup>73</sup> J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976, p. 147. Keith Thomas refers to the way in which saints, formulae, amulets and the other rituals, which were believed to draw down God's blessings in the Middle Ages, were regarded as "possessing a power which was more than merely spiritual or symbolic". Ibid., pp.31-2. This power was not considered to be distinct from that of a secular, material, world (Ibid., p. 52).

<sup>74</sup> Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, New York: Academic Press, 1980, p. 56.

## The Presumed and the So-called

The response of post-Reformation Dutch Calvinists to local words highlights the differences between Dutch and Malay thinking in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which in Foucault's terms might be described as a difference between "resemblance" and "representation".<sup>75</sup> The power of words is conveyed in the extent to which Dutchmen felt threatened. Two themes are closely linked in the VOC responses to Raja Sakti's language. These are repulsion and denial. Raja Sakti's letters are described in VOC reports as "conceited", "fanciful" and "bumptious". Scattered letters from Raja Sakti and his adherents which appeared in the markets were said to be in "obscure" language. Not only was their language repellent to the seventeenth century Dutch mind, it was also deemed not authentic. Dutch sources refer to Raja Sakti's "sly and malevolent discourse", to his "treacherous letters" with their "hypocritical" words which were nothing but "fabricated pieces of knavery".

So threatening were the words and titles associated with princely leaders like Raja Sakti and Raja Ibrahim that the Dutch writers qualified their use in phrases such as "the presumed" and the "so-called". VOC reports refer to the "soo genaamde Raja Ibrahim",<sup>76</sup> the "pretended" Raja Suruaso<sup>77</sup> and the "professed" envoys and courtiers of the Minangkabau king.<sup>78</sup> The records are suffused with phrases of this

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<sup>75</sup> The Reformation reaction against belief in the the power of words and objects is discussed by Thomas, *Regigion and the Decline of Magic*, Chapter Three. As noted in Chapter Six this onslaught on the "magical" aspects of Caltholic doctrine is not unlike the Dutch reaction to the "superstitious" beliefs of Southeast Asian Muslims in the seventeenth century.

<sup>76</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VI, p. 766. For other, similar phrases, see *Generale Missiven*, vol. V, p. 34; vol. VII, p. 69.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., vol. VII, p. 15. Dutch reports referred to the "pretended" or "supposed" (*gewaande*) holiness of the "thrown-up" king, Raja Sakti. Ibid., vol. V, p. 79.

<sup>78</sup> "Voorhaven afgesanten en hovelingen te wesen van haren Koning Jang Dipertuang", Ibid., vol. VI, p. 812. Denial of the authenticity of local words and names went hand in hand with a Dutch language of contagion; regions were said to be "infested" by "priestly" rebels.

sort which repudiate the authenticity and meaning of local language. Like the *quansuis* titles of west coast leaders, this vocabulary of scepticism was used by the Dutch to distance themselves from the uncontrollable potency of local words.

VOC records suggest that the sense of threat felt by the Company was well founded. The power of royal language became even more apparent in the early eighteenth century as Minangkabau rulers involved themselves in increasing anti-Dutch protest in the coastal regions of Sumatra.

## CHAPTER NINE

### BROADCASTING THE ROYAL WORD

The detailed consideration of Raja Ibrahim and Raja Sakti and of the process of their empowerment, provides a basis for an examination of the broader scope of Minangkabau activism in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Minangkabau kings and their representatives were involved in numerous local rebellions against the VOC in this period. The rulers asserted themselves to the Dutch and their letters became, in the eighteenth century, an outpouring of authoritative words directed at the coastal regions of Sumatra. Royal representatives offered leadership to local groups in the *rantau* and Padang itself came under concerted attack. Even the Dutch were forced to admit the effectiveness of the ruler's language.

To appreciate the range of Minangkabau political involvement in the coastal regions it will be necessary to consider events in both west and east Sumatra.

#### West Sumatra

At the beginning of the eighteenth century a number of factors contributed to the existing climate of resentment towards the VOC and prompted local leaders to appeal to the Minangkabau court for help.<sup>1</sup> A pro-Dutch *panghulu*, Sutan Amas,

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<sup>1</sup> We have already seen that the VOC fixed prices and interfered with the terms of trade in such a way that locals were disadvantaged. The *darat* was also antagonized by Dutch attempts to break the commercial connections between local cotton producers and the weavers of the highlands and by the prevention of local sales of salt and salt pans to the people of the interior. The economic impact of VOC policies in west Sumatra is discussed by Dobbin in *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 80-5. As nervous VOC officials admitted, there was also widespread suspicion and hostility towards the "white men" in the inland districts where, unlike the *pesisir*, people did not have widespread experience of foreign traders. SWK 1690 VOC 1462, f. 453r. Rumours circulated concerning the way in which the Christians might force conversion upon Muslims. See, for instance, SWK 1718 VOC 1895, f. 13.

attacked the negeri of Sintu Alang and displaced the rajas there which caused widespread indignation. Cloth prices rose again and there was also said to be a heavy mortality among the local people.<sup>2</sup> The old Panglima Raja also died in 1701 and the Company's choice of his nephew, Raja Alam, as his successor was unpopular.<sup>3</sup> Resentment against the Dutch intensified and a group of *panghulu* from Pauh, always at odds with the Company, appealed to the Raja of Pagaruyung claiming that the west coast was in complete confusion, *hiru-biru*.<sup>4</sup>

The identity of this Raja Pagaruyung is not entirely certain, but he was probably the son of Sultan Inderma Syah who died in 1698. During the first half of the eighteenth century two branches of the royal house appear to have been active on the west coast. Dutch sources refer to a Raja Gagar Alam (also known as Sultan Ahmad Syah) of Pagaruyung, who was the old king's son and to Inderma Syah of Suruaso, who was his grandson.<sup>5</sup> In general terms Raja Gagar Alam Alam was more involved in anti-VOC activities than the Suruaso prince, Inderma Syah, who sought accomodation with and recognition from the VOC.

The court's interest and involvement in west coast affairs is reflected in a series of brief letters to Padang from the Pauh *panghulu*. Between April and May 1702 the *panghulu* wrote to assert the importance of Raja Pagaruyung, to demand that he be

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<sup>2</sup> Van Basel, "Begin en Voortgang", p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> The Panglima Raja's son, Raja Ibrahim was involved in resistance towards the VOC (Ibid., p. 56). Raja Alam's appointment caused great resentment and the terms of succession for the invented position of Panglima Raja were an issue for debate. This is discussed in detailed terms in reports from C.F. Hofman in 1715-17, SWK 1715 VOC 1854, f.114-23. Hofman's handling of this matter eventually led to his dismissal.

<sup>4</sup> This is mentioned in a letter from the Pauh panghulus to Padang, SWK 1703 VOC 1664, ff. 84-7.

<sup>5</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VI, pp. 6-7 and Macleod, 1906 II p. 1448. The existence of two rulers is not explicitly acknowledged in VOC reports from this period and has been identified on the basis of letters from the rulers and an examination of the context in which they were written. The presence of two rulers in Tanah Datar is discussed briefly in Appendix Five.

recognised and to complain about Sultan Amas.<sup>6</sup> Two letters also arrived under the name of Sultan Inderma Syah. One enquired about the succession to the Panglima Rajaship and the other, with its lengthy Minangkabau introduction and titles omitted by the VOC scribes, told the VOC to confine its activities to trade.<sup>7</sup> In 1704 Ahmad Syah Gagar Alam also wrote to say that ten of the west coast *panghulu* had "fallen at his feet" complaining about the disunity and ruin of the coastal regions. He issued orders to the VOC for the proper government of the coast. If Company servants did not obey these orders, he wrote, his subjects would not trade with them.<sup>8</sup>

The impact of royal leadership was also acknowledged by the Dutch in 1712-13 when a large force of Minangkabau came down to the coast under the leadership of the "pretended" descendants of the old king Raja Gagar Alam and Raja Suruaso (presumably Inderma Syah). According to VOC reports they wanted to bring the west coast under their control and to drive the Company away. The VOC's ally, the Sultan of Inderapura, considered that there was a very real threat and VOC servants were forced to acknowledge the influence that of these princely leaders.<sup>9</sup> The population of Pauh and their *panghulu* were reported to have followed Raja Suruaso because of the "imagined holiness of his family".<sup>10</sup> The spiritual force of this very "real" attack on Padang is illustrated by the fact that the local army was included five hundred "clerics

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<sup>6</sup> SWK 1703 VOC 1644, ff. 84-86.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., ff. 86-7.

<sup>8</sup> SWK 1705 VOC 1692, f. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Van Basel, "Begin en Voortgang", p. 65 and also Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VII, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Kielstra, "Onze Kennis van Sumatra's Westkust", p. 537. Part of this force moved on Padang from a base at Pauh, but it was repulsed in an ambush by European and Bugis troops. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VII (1713), p. 15. Reference to these events has not been located in the west coast papers.

or priests", dressed all in white and holding rosaries in their right hands.<sup>11</sup>

Company servants discussed appeasing Raja Gagar Alam with gifts. But the level of European brutality and arrogance to which these local leaders were responding suggests that this would not have been enough to stem the opposition. One of the local complaints concerned the destruction of gravestones at Pariaman in the last Company offensive there. These were sent home to Holland as ballast.<sup>12</sup> In their attempts to subdue west Sumatra the VOC were not just undermining local trade they assaulted fundamental beliefs and cultural precepts embodied in the *adat*. The reaction they met was not simply a question of material grievances channelled into religious expression. It was a more profound response to Dutch violations of the social and sacred meanings of local life.

Further Minangkabau offensives against the Dutch took place in 1714 when Raja Gagar Alam harassed Pariaman in company with a "priestly commander" known as Sijunju and again, in 1716, when Sijunju attacked Padang.<sup>13</sup> The Raja Dua Celas were also said to have struck at Sungai Paguh in retaliation for the region's continued allegiance to the Company.<sup>14</sup> The involvement of the court in west coast affairs was further manifested in 1714 when Ahmad Syah Gagar Alam and Bendahara Putih wrote to the VOC on behalf of Raja Johan of Ulakan who had been ejected from his

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<sup>11</sup> Kielstra, "Onze Kennis van Sumatra's Westkust", pp. 537-8. I have not been able to trace this reference in the manuscript records. For another reference to the use of rosaries in the archipelago at a similar time see G. E. Rumphius, *Herbarium Amboinense*, Amsterdam: S. Schouten, 1755, Book VIII, Ch. xxii, p. 178. Rumphuis describes how men would sit for hours reciting long rosaries.

<sup>12</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VII, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VII, p. 207. Sijunju was active in encouraging the court to oppose the VOC, see SWK 1715 VOC 1854, ff. 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VII, p. 117.



*negeri*.<sup>15</sup>

Royal letters circulated as part of this local resistance. These were used and re-used, often in unauthorized contexts. The rulers wrote to Padang warning against false letters and envoys and Company reports complain of the way the population sought to acquire royal letters for various purposes.<sup>16</sup> Abraham Patras warned Nicholas de Groot that, "the highlanders obtain letters from the king and use them for their own purposes".<sup>17</sup> Several VOC reports mention "fingered letters" which were presented to the Company in support of some aim and had obviously been kept and were being recycled.<sup>18</sup> As Patras informed his successor, he had been forced to become skilled in the art of identifying seals so that he could determine the origin and status of a letter.<sup>19</sup>

Within this context of local insurgency and appeals to the court, Minangkabau rulers affirmed their authority in typical style. They transmitted their words to the coast in what appear to have been increasingly assertive letters. When writing to the Dutch the rulers demanded the restoration of recognition payments.<sup>20</sup> These had

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<sup>15</sup> SWK 1714 VOC 1841, ff. 69-70. According to Ahmad Syah Gagar Alam's letter the Baginda Maulana of Batipu was hostile to Raja Johan. Batipu was locked in tension with Ulakan and Pariaman over access to the coast. Bendahara Putih claimed that Raja Johan had been adopted as a son by the Puteri Jamilan, who begins to be mentioned in the Padang records from this period and was identified as mother-in-law of Ahmad Syah Gagar Alam. SWK 1714 VOC 1841, f. 70. The Puteri Jamilan is also mentioned by Hofman SWK 1715 VOC 1854, ff. 8-9. This Puteri Jamilan was succeeded by her daughter when she died, SWK 1718 VOC 1895, f. 16.

<sup>16</sup> SWK 1703 VOC 1664, f. 258; SWK 1728 VOC 2074, f. 117; SWK 1731 VOC 2164, f. 345.

<sup>17</sup> SWK 1721 VOC 1946, f. 39.

<sup>18</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VI, p. 643.

<sup>19</sup> SWK 1721 VOC 1946, ff. 45-6.

<sup>20</sup> After 1691 he old Inderma Syah wrote assertive letters in which he demanded tribute from his subjects in west Sumatra in accordance with the contract which his father (Ahmad Syah) had made with the Company. VOC servants, such as Solomon Lesage, denied any knowledge of this contract and tried to satisfy the ruler with gifts.

fallen off during the 1680's in the disturbed climate of the succession dispute. The VOC's tardy response and refusal to acknowledge that they were bound by any sort of agreement also provoked a virtual rewriting of recent history by the Minangkabau court. In several letters, in 1692 and 1693 and also in later years, the rulers described the recovery of the west coast from Aceh in terms which ignored the VOC role. In these letters the past was ordered in such a way that the king's determinations were central and the VOC peripheral. The ruler was said to have given the west coast to his child the Raja of Aceh, but had later reconsidered and had ordered the Panglima Raja to expel the Acehnese and invite the VOC to come and trade. In their letters the Minangkabau rulers ignored the fact that Panglima Raja was a Dutch appointee, emphasising this local figure rather than the Dutch as their representative.<sup>21</sup> They told the VOC that it was only permitted on the west coast to trade, not to make war.<sup>22</sup> From the perspective of the court, it seems, the relationship with the VOC only worked if the Dutch made "recognition payments", or tribute, and maintained a respectful correspondence with the court.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Dutch officials noted that, in some royal letters, the local *regenten* were given more honour than the Dutch, SWK 1703 VOC 1664, f. 65.

<sup>22</sup> SWK 1692 VOC 1498, ff. 515v.-517r. and SWK 1694 VOC 1536, f. 301r. The first of these letters states that the west coast had been granted to the Queen of Aceh and the second that it was given to "our child the Raja of Aceh". The VOC was told that it was only in west Sumatra to trade in a letter from Inderma Syah's successor of the same name in 1703, SWK 1703 VOC 1644, f. 87. Other letters in the same vein were sent in 1724, 1727 and 1730, SWK 1725 VOC 2013, ff. 107-114, SWK 1728 VOC 2074, f. 117. and SWK 1731 VOC 2164, f. 345.

<sup>23</sup> Raja Gagar Alam wrote in 1713, SWK 1714 VOC 1841, f. 69; Bendahara Putih also wrote to the VOC asking them to regularise their relationship with Raja Gagar Alam, this is mentioned in a report by Hofman, SWK 1715 VOC 1854, f. 114. In their letters the rulers emphasized the old contract, the conditions obtaining in Groenewegen's time and the importance of retaining these practices. SWK 1718 VOC 1895, f. 48. In 1716 Sultan Inderma Syah sent his elder brother, Abdul Jalil, to the coast to represent him. He was rejected by the Dutch as an imposter and several letters were sent from the court to Padang to assert Abdul Jalil's status, Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VII, p. 283 and SWK 1718 VOC 1895, f. 15, f. 48 and f. 95.

Royal letters in this period were increasingly elaborate and poetic.<sup>24</sup> The kings to the Dutch as though they were subjects and they summoned homage with their words. One example of a letter, translated by the Dutch, stated,

This letter shall be blown forth over each *suku* on a morning wind which comes with a force of well-being which is mingled with sweet smelling scents from the lovely gardens of paradise until it penetrates men's brains. It comes, as if from an eternal love, in order to make the most worthy revelations and to spread fortune, to which end I am Sultan over the land and the sea, possessing a power and force which has been obtained from God.<sup>25</sup>

Whether they were representing their greatness to the Dutch in their magnificent letters or inciting opposition against the VOC in similar terms, Minangkabau kings broadcast their authority in decorated letters and with a resonant language which was an essential part of their authority.<sup>26</sup>

In the face of these assertions by the court and a tumult of dissent on the west coast, eighteenth century VOC officials were inclined to be less dismissive of Minangkabau rulers than their predecessors. Despite earlier suggestions by VOC officials that the kings were not involved in the "real" business of the west coast, it was gradually acknowledged in the eighteenth century that the rulers of Minangkabau did have the ability to promote or hinder west coast trade. In 1717 Abraham Patras

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<sup>24</sup> One such letter from 1691 has already been quoted in Chapter Seven. The king was described as a representative of God, as being beyond praise and never sufficiently honoured, Emperor over the whole world, King of Kings, under whom all mankind was shadowed as if by a canopy. These lengthy letters also listed the many *kebesaran*, or signs of Minangkabau greatness. SWK 1691 VOC 1485, ff. 524-7.

<sup>25</sup> SWK 1725 VOC 2013, ff. 108-9. "door toedoen van den propheet zal dese brief voort gewaaijd werden door een morgen wind bij elk soucco of geslagt met een kragt van welstand die onder een welriekende reuk van allehande schoenelyk thuijn saat in het paradijs voorkomt, en tot in d'herenen door dringt, komen als uijt een eertijds liefde, om een hoog waarde verhaal te doen en geluk strekke ten welken ejnde en ik Sultan over het aardrijk ende zee besittende magt en kragt ook van God verkregen.." Similar wording was used in a letter from Inderma Syah sent in 1716, SWK 1717 VOC 1883, f. 32.

<sup>26</sup> VOC records say very little about the physical appearance of royal letters unless a seal was in doubt, but at least one is described in the documents as being "decorated", Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VII, p. 283.

commented upon the extent to which friendly relations with the court could promote trade.<sup>27</sup> Patras made the point again in 1721 when he urged an accomodation with the king so that he would promote Padang's trade, rather than hinder it.<sup>28</sup> A report of 1714 also mentions that Inderma Syah actually lifted his orders against trade with the Europeans after a friendly overture from the Company.<sup>29</sup>

Eighteenth century officials were also more inclined than those of the seventeenth century to attribute the influence of the rulers to their sacred authority. Hoffman wrote to Batavia in 1714 urging that the withheld "recognition payments" should be made to Raja Gagar Alam (whom he regarded as "the" king). When the payments were delayed, he said, the rulers could cause trouble for the VOC by inciting the people against them. Padang would be vulnerable, he suggested, because "the deep seated veneration in which this spiritual king is held in the hearts of his subjects can do much".<sup>30</sup>

Eighteenth century VOC records mention numerous small uprisings against the European presence which were led by princes of the Minangkabau royal house.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> SWK 1718 VOC 1895, f. 48 and f. 50.

<sup>28</sup> SWK 1721 VOC 1946, f. 39. It was hoped that a marriage, in 1717, between the nephew of Raja Suruaso and the daughter of the then Panglima Raja would lead to an increase in trade. SWK 1719 VOC 1911, f. 19. During periods of friendship between Padang and the court in the eighteenth century, the ruler's letters expressed his interest in promoting commerce with the coast. See, for instance, SWK 1728 VOC 2074, f. 117; SWK 1731 VOC 2164, f. 20; and SWK 1733 VOC 2240, f. 1129.

<sup>29</sup> SWK 1715 VOC 1854, ff.8-9.

<sup>30</sup> SWK 1715 VOC 1854, f. 120. As Coolhaas notes, in passage summarising, the *Generale Missiven*, "the coastal people retained their belief in the supernatural quality of the Minangkabau kingdom", *Ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> As the position of the VOC in west Sumatra deteriorated local communities became increasingly apt to attack the Dutch. By the 1720's the VOC's position in west Sumatra was increasingly precarious. Profits were few, unrest common and English merchants, with their supplies of superior textlies from India, were making inroads into the VOC sphere. For a description of the decline in Dutch trade see Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 88-9. In 1725 the former polulation of Pauh sought to return to their abandoned rice fields. When the Company drove them away they returned with support from the 12 Kota. It emerged that a number of

Although we do not know whether all of these carried *surat cap* the pattern of royal representation in the *rantau* is, nevertheless, clear.

In 1727, for example, rumours circulated of an attack on Padang led by the Raja Suruaso (nephew of Inderma Syah) and a Muslim "pope".<sup>32</sup> Similarly in 1734-5 a Yang Dipertuan, prince of the Minangkabau royal house, accompanied by a "Muhammadan priest" led an anti-Dutch movement in the northern ports of Barus, Sorkam, Korlang and Tapanuli.<sup>33</sup>

Again, in 1740, an uprising in Pauh and Kota Tengah was led by Abdul Jalil, a Minangkabau prince from Pagaruyung, who was so emboldened by the VOC's weakness that he replaced the *panghulu* in several northern *negeri*.<sup>34</sup> In 1745 a rebellion at Kambang, Siranti and Pariaman was led by a Minangkabau prince and in 1750 Pariaman rebelled again under Minangkabau leadership.<sup>35</sup> Natal and Tapanuli were also involved in anti-Dutch activities with Minangkabau princes in the later 1740's and 1750's.<sup>36</sup>

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the Padang *panghulu* were involved in this movement including the Panglima Raja. These events demonstrated the increasing weakness of the VOC's hold on the west coast, van Basel, "Begin en Voortgang", pp. 72-3.

<sup>32</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VII, p. 113 and SWK 1728 VOC 2074, f. 10.

<sup>33</sup> Van Basel, "Begin en Voortgang", pp. 76-8. This Yang Dipertuan remained in the region for a couple of years and appears to be remembered in Barus history as Daulat from Pagaruyung who is mentioned in local chronicles. Drakard, *A Malay Frontier*, pp. 130-2. It may have been this prince who brought the Minangkabau *surat cap* which is incorporated into the manuscript of a royal chronicle from Barus. This letter is mentioned in Chapter Seven above.

<sup>34</sup> Van Basel, "Begin en Voortgang", p. 79. The pro-Dutch *panghulu* of Barus reported that Abdul Jalil had recruited followers in Natal and other northern regions, SWK 1743 VOC 2571, f. 122, f. 275, cited in Anne Lindsay Reber, *The Private Trade of the British in West Sumatra, 1735-1770*, Unpublished Phd Thesis, University of Hull, (1977), p. 189.

<sup>35</sup> Van Basel, "Begin en Voortgang", pages 81 and 87.

<sup>36</sup> It was reported that a Raja Suruaso conferred with *panghulu* in Natal later in the 1740's, and in 1752 a "bastard son of the Minangkabau prince of Pagaruyung" was said to have conferred with Raja Simorang of Tapanuli about replacing the VOC with English protection, Reber, *The Private Trade*, pages 194 and 230.

Although there were important differences between the coastal regions of east and west Sumatra, the patterns of royal letter writing and delegation which emerge in west Sumatra are also evident on the east coast. In east Sumatra, too, the early eighteenth century was a period of energetic involvement for the Minangkabau court.

### East Sumatra

Links between the Minangkabau court and the east coast of Sumatra were long standing, but their character also depended upon specific local conditions. The distances involved were much greater than in west Sumatra and the mountains and the coast were linked by extensive river systems.<sup>37</sup>

The *Sejarah Melayu* depicts tensions between Melaka and Minangkabau over Siak, Inderagiri and Jambi and in the seventeenth and eighteenth these east Sumatran coastal centres were rarely under the control of Minangkabau representatives.<sup>38</sup> Instead there were a number of intermediate centres between the highlands and the east coast which served as buffers which marketed Minangkabau goods as well as disseminating Minangkabau authority. Patapahan upstream from Siak, Gunung Sailan on the Kampar, Kuantan upstream from Inderagiri and Muara Tebo in the interior of Jambi were all centres which performed these functions and were often under the control of a Minangkabau delegate, a raja who was related to the

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<sup>37</sup> The river systems of east Sumatra and their relationship to commercial networks have been examined by Akira Oki in "The River Trade in Central and South Sumatra in the 19th Century", *Environment, Agriculture and Society in the Malay World*, edited by T. Kato, Muchtar Lufti and Narifumi Maeda, Kyoto: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1986, pp. 3-48. An excellent description of the geographic world of central Sumatra can be found in Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, Chapter One while T. Kato has written one of best comparisons of the west and eastern *rantau* regions in *Matriliney and Migration*, Chapter Three.

<sup>38</sup> The *Sejarah Melayu* perspective is discussed in Chapter Two above and in the following chapter.

Minangkabau royal house. As we saw in Chapter Two, the influence of Minangkabau rajas in upper Jambi was noted by the Dutch in the mid seventeenth century. Envoys with Minangkabau royal credentials, like Raja Hitam, mentioned in Chapter Five, often travelled to the eastern *rantau* where their status was recognised by the Minangkabau communities settled there.

Links between the highlands and the east coast had a flexible character and depended to some extent upon the ebb and flow of international trade. When Jambi developed as a important pepper port early in the seventeenth century, for instance, large numbers of Minangkabaus migrated into its hinterland known as the nine rivers or Sembilan Chi.<sup>39</sup> By the eighteenth century the decline in pepper prices obliged the downstream ruler at Jambi to share power with the Hulu and the kingdom was virtually split between a Minangkabau-approved ruler in the Hulu and the Javanized court in the Hilir.

Similarly the development of a tin trade in Siak in the seventeenth century contributed to the importance of that region and the power of the Minangkabau producers up-river. By the early eighteenth century Johor was weakened by conflict with the Bugis and by the doubtful status of the Bendahara dynasty which acceded in 1699. In this climate the Minangkabau court became actively involved in representing its east coast subjects and asserting its own authority. Minangkabau activity in east Sumatra in this period reflects the same mode of royal representation which is apparent in west Sumatran sources. Members of the royal house broadcast their authority in letters to the Dutch, credentials carried by royal representatives, letters urging rebellion against the VOC or against the Bendahara dynasty of Melaka and a category of letters which, as Leonard Andaya has observed,

were sent by the Pagar Ruyong court to the west and east coasts of Sumatra

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<sup>39</sup> Barbara Andaya, "Cash-Cropping", p. 114.

whenever some tragedy or disaster occurred. They all had a central theme calling for the re-establishment of safe and proper conditions so that trade could flourish without hindrance.<sup>40</sup>

In 1725, for example a Raja Pagaruyung appears to have written to Johor attesting the friendship (*sumpah setia*) between Pagaruyung, Gunung Sailan (on the Kampar river) and Johor. The ruler used the title Khalifat Allah and he invoked the curse, *besi kawi*.<sup>41</sup>

Raja Sakti was involved in upper Jambi between 1687-91 disseminating his message in letters from Muara Tebo and in subsequent years VOC records frequently refer to the appearance of individuals who sought to win support in the region and who brandished letters from the Minangkabau court. Although the Dutch considered many of these to be "forgeries" they were clearly thought to be effective.<sup>42</sup> According to Barbara Andaya, "the appearance of Minangkabau adventurers, claiming grandiose titles and purporting to be direct envoys of Pagaruyong, became commonplace" in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Moreover, "on a number of occasions Minangkabau rulers made apparent their deep interest in Jambi politics."<sup>43</sup>

In the early eighteenth century, for example, both the Minangkabau princess Puteri Jamilan and a ruler entitled Sultan Mualam Duli Yang Dipertuan Besar Syah

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<sup>40</sup> L. Andaya, *The Kingdom of Johor*, p. 251.

<sup>41</sup> This letter was incorporated in a Malay text from Johor. See Ernst Ulrich Kratz, *Peringatan Sejarah Negeri Johor*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973, pp. 48-50. Gunung Sailan was a peripheral royal centre in upper Kampar. It is possible that the ruler there may have been a descendant and deputy of the royal house who sought to regularise relations between Johor downstream and Pagaruyung upstream. Like other Minangkabau delegates and representatives he wrote in the style and name of the court. In Chapter Two it was noted how the Sultan of Inoman in upper Inderagiri wrote to the VOC as Raja Pagaruyung in the 1640's.

<sup>42</sup> See, for instance, Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VI, p. 821.

<sup>43</sup> Andaya "Cash-Cropping", p. 115.



of Pagaruyung wrote to the VOC about Jambi affairs.<sup>44</sup> The Puteri Jamilan, in particular, sent a number of letters in which she asserted Minangkabau authority in Jambi.<sup>45</sup> She claimed to have aided Sultan Ingalaga during his conflict with the VOC.<sup>46</sup> Sultan Mualam Duli Besar Syah also appears to have supported Pangeran Pringabaya when he established an alternative, upstream, court at Mangunjaya.<sup>47</sup> In 1712 He wrote to the Dutch complaining about the destruction of Mangunjaya which, he said was ruled by his son's son Sultan Seri Maharaja Batu Johan Pahalawan Alam Syah, a name for Pangeran Pringabaya.<sup>48</sup>

Like the rulers who wrote to the west Sumatran *rantau*, Puteri Jamilan stated that she had obtained her position of honour from the prophet Muhammad through Suleiman and Iskandar Zulkarnain.<sup>49</sup> Most of the Minangkabau royal letters which have survived in the Jambi and Melaka papers are shorter and less elaborate than

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<sup>44</sup> Leonard Andaya has identified the role of the Puteri Jamilan as a vital link in the transmission of Minangkabau royal status. He suggests that the eldest sisters of reigning princes took this title, and that the Pagaruyung and Suruaso branches intermarried. (*The Kingdom of Johor*, p. 268.) This is consistent with a Dutch report from 1717 that the Puteri Jamilan was mother-in-law of Raja Gagar Alam of Pagaruyung and was succeeded by her daughter (SWK 1714 VOC 1841, f. 70 and SWK 1718 VOC 1895, f. 16). What is not clear is whether two people, princesses from Pagaruyung and Suruaso, held the position simultaneously as Andaya implies. For a discussion of the first reference to the Puteri Jamilan in west coast records, see note 95 above.

<sup>45</sup> Jambi 1710 VOC 1759, ff. 42-3.

<sup>46</sup> In a letter of 1709 she wrote to the two kings of Jambi reminding them that she had given their father, Sultan Ingalaga, the region from Hujung Jabang inland. She asked the kings of Jambi to restore the coast to Minangkabau, Jambi 1711 VOC 1794, ff. 43-4.

<sup>47</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VI, p. 63. This ruler stated that he was "in possession of the royal seat of Minangkabau", but is by no means easy to be sure who was who in terms of the divisions within the royal house in this period. Pagaruyung becomes a general name for the court in the early eighteenth century and from 1727 even Inderma Syah was addressed by the VOC at Padang as ruler of Suruaso at Pagaruyung. Neither is it clear whether there were still three centres - Suruaso, Pagaruyung/Negeri and Pagaruyung/Buo - and how many princes were functioning in the interior. In 1717 this confusion is aggravated by what appear to be contradictory letters from Pagaruyung to Melaka. See L. Andaya, *The Kingdom of Johor*, p. 250; also Melaka 1718 VOC 1895, ff. 97-8.

<sup>48</sup> Jambi 1713 VOC 1827, ff. 18-19.

<sup>49</sup> Jambi 1711 VOC 1794, ff. 43-4.

many received by the VOC in west Sumatra in the same period. Nevertheless the rulers' still enumerate the most important items of Minangkabau royal regalia which came to them through Iskandar and by God's grace. These include the Kamat wood, the weaving Sansita, and the gold known as Emas Jati-Jati.<sup>50</sup>

As in west Sumatran there are numerous examples of Minangkabau princes who travelled to the eastern *rantau* in the eighteenth century and attracted support by representing the interests of the migrant Minangkabau communities there.<sup>51</sup>

The authority of Minangkabau royal signs and the pattern in which royal words were broadcast to the east Sumatran coastal regions is perhaps best illustrated by the appearance, at Bengkalis in 1717, of a prince called Raja Kecil who carried Minangkabau royal insignia and a letter from the court.

Raja Kecil claimed to be rightful heir to the throne of Johor and his appearance in east Sumatra was linked to events in Johor at the end of the seventeenth century. In 1699 Sultan Muhammad Syah of Johor, who was a direct descendant of the Melaka royal line and could trace his ancestry to Bukit Seguntang, was murdered by the nobles of Johor on account of his tyranny. This regicide was a shocking event in the Malay world with widespread repercussions; it shattered old loyalties and undermined the basis of relations between ruler and subject in the Melaka-Johor realm. The Bendahara became ruler in Muhammad Syah's place, but the Bendahara dynasty was

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<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, Jambi 1711 VOC 1794, ff. 43-4. A distinct feature of letters sent by the court to the east coast is the way these refer to the Minangkabau rulers as kings living behind the green mountain, Gunung Hijau. This does not appear in royal letters sent to the west coast.

<sup>51</sup> These examples are too numerous to detail, but they include envoys who travelled to the Malay Peninsula such as the Rajas Malewa and Mandersa who wrote to the VOC at Melaka in 1721 to say that they were under orders from the ruler of Pagaruyung. He had commanded that they should regularize affairs in those dependencies of Johor which had been corrupted. For this reason they were going to Rembau which had united with the Bugis. They asked for the Company's help. Melaka 1722 VOC 1961, f.37 and Coolhaas *Generale Missiven*, vol. VII, p. 538.

never considered to possess the *daulat* or divine sovereignty of the old Melaka line.<sup>52</sup>

Raja Kecil represented a challenge to this illegitimate royal line whose position was based upon the ultimate Malay crime of *derhaka* or treason. He claimed to be a son of the murdered Sultan, Muhammad Syah, who had been brought up at the in the Minangkabau court of Pagaruyung. There is no firm evidence that Raja Kecil was Muhammad Syah's son, but his sponsorship by the royal house of Minangkabau, also descended from Bukit Seguntang, was affirmed in letters from the Puteri Jamilan.<sup>53</sup> At Bengkalis, and elsewhere in the vicinity of the Melaka Straits, Raja Kecil acquired a large following based upon his twofold claims to royal status.<sup>54</sup> Among the Minangkabau communities Raja Kecil's role as an emissary from the Minangkabau court was crucial; and as a claimant to the throne of Johor he also gained a wide following among the seafaring folk of the straits, the *orang laut*, and the Johor nobles who had been alienated by the murder of Sultan Muhammad Syah.<sup>55</sup> Raja Kecil's success in threatening Johor and accumulating support in east Sumatra has been discussed in detail elsewhere.<sup>56</sup> What is of interest here is the way in which his political activism exemplifies the same pattern of Minangkabau royal representation as that of Raja Ibrahim, Raja Sakti and other princes who displayed Minangkabau royal signs in the *rantau*

In Raja Kecil's case the nature of these signs is discussed in Dutch and also

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<sup>52</sup> This is a summary of the argument presented by L. Andaya, in *Kingdom of Johor*, Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine.

<sup>53</sup> VOC 1911 Melaka 1719, 17 March 1718 f. 5-6.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter Nine.

<sup>55</sup> Raja Kecil's claim to be descended from Sultan Muhammad Syah is mentioned in a report from the Governor of Melaka to Batavia, Melaka 1718 VOC 1895, f.43 cited in Andaya, *Kingdom of Johor*, p. 273 n.2. See also Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VII, p. 342.

<sup>56</sup> Raja Kecil's attack on Johor is discussed in detail in Chapter Nine of Andaya's *Kingdom of Johor* which has also been published as an article entitled "Raja Kecil and the Minangkabau Conquest of Johor in 1718", *JMBRAS*, vol. 45, 2 (1972), pp. 51-74.

Malay sources. The European records confirm that Raja Kecil possessed a Minangkabau royal seal.<sup>57</sup> And there is also evidence to suggest that he may have carried other royal *kebesaran* entrusted to him by the Minangkabau royal house. In 1718 the Puteri Jamilan wrote to the Dutch at Melaka stating that "she had sent Muhammad Syah's son to rule over Bengkalis and that she had provided him with the ornaments and garments of the murdered ruler".<sup>58</sup>

Malay sources relate that Raja Kecil was invested with these royal signs at an installation ceremony held in Pagaruyung. The *Siak Chronicles* is a text from a later period which, in part, records the history of the Siak dynasty founded by Raja Kecil.<sup>59</sup> In the text Raja Kecil is said to have been installed (*dinobatkan*) and crowned by the Yang Dipertuan Sakti of Pagaruyung and Puteri Jamilan. They presented Raja Kecil with key items of Minangkabau, rather than Johor, *pusaka* and the ceremony itself involved items of *kebesaran* which are often listed in *surat cap*. These include the drum which was covered with the skins of lice (Gendang Kulit Tuma), a pillar made from, or covered with, stinging nettles (Tiang Teras Kayu Jelatanglah) and the lance (Tetaran Segar). Raja Kecil was also presented, it is stated, with a *cap* which introduced him as a child of the Yang Dipertuan Sakti of Pagaruyung who was travelling to the coast.<sup>60</sup> The text thus emphasises Raja Kecil's Minangkabau origins, rather than his Johor descent.

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<sup>57</sup> This is mentioned in a report from the Governor of Melaka to Batavia, Melaka 1720 VOC 1945, f. 174, also cited Andaya, *Kingdom of Johor*, p. 276, n. 48.

<sup>58</sup> Andaya, *Kingdom of Johor*, p. 269, and VOC 1911 Melaka 1719, 17 March 1718 f. 5-6. The Puteri Jamilan's patronage of Raja Kecil is not unlike her relationship, described in the west Sumatran papers, with Raja Johan. See note 15 above.

<sup>59</sup> The date of this text, which is also known as *Sejarah Melayu*, is uncertain. It appears to present an eighteenth century Siak perspective on local events. The manuscript used in the present study is held in the Leiden University Library Cod. Or. 7304.

<sup>60</sup> Cod. Or. 7304, p. 423.

The wording used in the *cap* which the text describes is reminiscent of extant *surat cap* which are available in Malay. It commanded the *anak* Minangkabau living in the coastal regions around Sumatra (Pulau Perca) to help Raja Kecil remove the shame on his family. Those subjects who refused would be struck by the Minangkabau curse, the *besi kawi*.<sup>61</sup> The text also depicts the way in which Minangkabau on the coast responded to Raja Kecil and his royal seal. This is instructive. Like the communities observed by VOC officials, they were awed by Raja Kecil's credentials. According to the text, when the local Minangkabau *panghulu* saw Raja Kecil's *cap* with the words (*titah*) of Yang Dipertuan Sakti they were startled and regarded Raja Kecil with fear. They all presented themselves before him and proclaimed themselves his slaves. They would be ruled, they said, entirely by his words. In this way, the text states, Raja Kecil gathered many followers.<sup>62</sup>

As in the cases of Raja Ibrahim and Raja Sakti, Raja Kecil appears to have been regarded in himself as a sign and an emanation of Minangkabau royal power.<sup>63</sup> The *Siak Chronicles* refer to Raja Kecil, as a "Minangkabau *pusaka*".<sup>64</sup> And Leonard Andaya has pointed to the parallel between this statement and another made by a Minangkabau ruler, in a letter introducing Raja Kecil to the VOC, who apologised for the absence of a seal, but suggested that "his brother's son was sufficient *cap*".<sup>65</sup> These statements find a corollary in a letter Inderma Syah to Padang in 1724 where

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<sup>61</sup> "Kena sumpahkan bisa kawi", Cod. Or. 7304, p. 424.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 425-6.

<sup>63</sup> Even the ruler's ambassador could be considered, according to one eighteenth century royal letter, "as if he were, himself, the person of Yang Dipertuan". SWK 1735 VOC 2315, f. 287.

<sup>64</sup> *Siak Chronicles*, p. 423, l. 11.

<sup>65</sup> L. Andaya, *Kingdom of Johor*, p. 252 and Melaka 1718 VOC 1895, f. 55 "als of mijn broers zoon selver een chiap was".

he refers to himself as an "image (*beeltenis*)" of mankind. The king was, moreover, a

remembrance for all men, worthy of eternity, who also possesses in his heart all the signs and holiness of the Quran and who is cherished in all places at all times.

We only have access to this letter in Dutch translation, but it is possible that the original Malay term for "remembrance" was *pusaka*, just as Raja Kecil was described as a *pusaka*.<sup>66</sup> The same idea has already been developed in relation to leaders such as Raja Ibrahim and Raja Sakti who appear to have been regarded as saintly talismans and embodiments of holy power. Minangkabau kings, it appears, presented themselves as signs, and embodiments, of God's power as well as being a source of His signs.

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This survey of Minangkabau royal activity in the *rantau* regions illustrates the relevance of kingship in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Minangkabau world. Minangkabau rulers made authoritative claims in east and west Sumatra in this period, and, with the grip of both Aceh and Melaka\Johor loosened, the Minangkabau court moved to claim the Sumatran coast. This was a period of "thrown up" (*opgeworpen*) kings, of "letter carriers", *bevel brieven* and rumour. The impact of Minangkabau sovereignty was felt in the *rantau* in a way which even Dutch East India Company servants perceived as having a real effect. Subjects made appeal to the court when there was confusion (*hiru biru*) and threat, and the Minangkabau

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<sup>66</sup> The Dutch term *gedachtenisse* can take an abstract or concrete meaning as either "memory" or "keepsake", van Dale, *Groot Woordenboek*, p. 409. But whether the Malay term translated as *gedachtenisse* represented an abstract idea (*ingatan* or memory) or a concrete form (*pusaka* or heirloom), the theme of embodying essence in signs is apparent. Another possibility is that "*gedachtenisse*" was a translation of the Arabic term "*shahāda*" ("sign" or "proof") used in nineteenth century *surat-cap*. See Chapter Ten below.

court responded to local needs by providing a host of charismatic leaders, who acted to focus and articulate local concerns.

Implicit in this formula is the geography of the Alam Minangkabau and the spread of Minangkabau communities into the *rantau*. On the fringes of the *Alam* there was a particular need for a means of linking Minangkabau communities and offering access to a wider source of authority. In a recent article Ken Young has pointed to the way in which nineteenth century colonial scholarship on Minangkabau may have over-emphasised *adat* as the political basis for Minangkabau life. Young does not question the role of *adat* for regulating life within Minangkabau communities, or *nagari*, but beyond the community, he argues, the scope of *adat* provisions were limited.<sup>67</sup> The *adat*, Young suggests could regulate relations within and between *nagari*, but it did not offer solutions for dealing with external challenges to the Minangkabau world.

For *merantau* Minangkabau living on the fringes of the Alam in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries kingship would have provided a resource which was available when problems arose that were too broad to be addressed by local *adat* and *suku* institutions.<sup>68</sup> Arguably this was never more necessary than in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries when the coastal regions were feeling the full effect of the VOC's stranglehold on trade. Royal envoys and royal discourse, transmitted by real or "pretended" delegates from the court, offered a framework

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<sup>67</sup> There were supra-*nagari* ties in Minangkabau society, he suggests, but their role was minimised by Dutch officials who sought to adapt *adat* for their own administrative purposes. Ken Young, "Minangkabau Authority Patterns and the Effects of Dutch Rule", in J. Maxwell (ed.) *The Malay-Islamic World of Sumatra*, Clayton: Monash University Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982, pp.63-74. One might add that the economic changes outlined by Dobbin, the upsurge of Islamic reformism in Minangkabau in the early nineteenth century, and the Paderi War would have had a profound effect on existing political institutions before the Dutch began to describe them.

<sup>68</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells, for instance, points to the importance of the Minangkabau ruler's role in the coastal regions as a source of equilibrium and arbitration between the *laras*. This perception of kingship, she points out, is reflected in coastal texts such as the *Undang-Undang Moko-Moko*. "Myth and Reality", pp. 121-41.

within which *rantau* communities could respond to the pressures they were under. The language of royal letters is concerned with the welfare and prosperity of the coastal regions, with restoring the strands and maintaining custom and order. Rather than controlling Minangkabau subjects, these envoys acted to link them with a broader political context and, through their rulers, Khalifat Allah, to offer them a source of empowerment. Europeans correctly identified Minangkabau royal language as a source of subversive energy, although they found it difficult to equate mere words with power. This chapter has argued that language was power when it was used to enact Minangkabau royal authority on the coast. Reading the *surat cap* genre in the context of the "authority of the sign" in seventeenth and eighteenth century Sumatran society helps us to understand show how this process of empowerment worked.

Reflecting on neighbourhood relations in Sumatra in an earlier period and upon the "shared values that united a ruler with his people" O. W. Wolters has identified the important role of local communication and the transmission of messages in Sumatra. He points out that

In Java the royal presence was immanent in the immovable monuments and inscriptions that signified it, but on the Sumatran rivers signs of the royal presence, the messengers, were mobile. The messengers probably flourished portable royal tokens, and we need not discount the possibility that the tokens were sometimes written ones, honoured even if they could not be read.<sup>69</sup>

In this and the previous chapter we have seen how important such tokens, or *tanda*, were in linking Minangkabau rulers with their subjects. Individuals, seals and letters were signs of the royal presence which could embody the power of the ruler, a power which was derived from God.

Why was it that Minangkabau kings were such an effective medium for the transmission of divine authority and what were the "shared values" which made the

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<sup>69</sup> O.W. Wolters, "Studying Srivijaya", JMBRAS vol. 52, 2 (1979) p. 17.



ruler's message of power so persuasive? To explore these questions further it is necessary to turn again to the Malay sources and to examine more closely the nature of the words which Minangkabau kings broadcast to their subjects.

## CHAPTER TEN

### ROYAL WORDS: TITAH YANG DIPERTUAN

Previous chapters have examined the European discourse on Minangkabau and have considered what European sources can tell us about the nature of Minangkabau kingship. These sources consistently point to the importance of language and of the letters and signs which were sent out from the court and were believed to be "indisputably true" in the coastal regions.<sup>1</sup> In Chapter Seven these letters were identified as a distinct group or genre of writing. The main features of this genre were identified in order that they might be recognised when they are mentioned in European accounts of political activity in the Minangkabau *rantau* in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. So far, however, little consideration has been given to the nature of Minangkabau language, to the words themselves.

This chapter is devoted to a reading of Minangkabau *surat cap* and to a close examination of the language of kingship they contain. We cannot know how the letters were understood in every context. The meanings with which they were invested would have depended as much on these individual contexts as upon their contents. Just as inscriptions could be venerated regardless of a lettered "reading" of their text, or rituals performed by those who cannot explain them, we should not assume that *surat cap* were "read" in any one particular way.

At the same time the words did seem to be important. There are striking similarities between letters from the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Many of the same things were said again and again. This repetition might suggest that the actual words did not matter or that they mattered greatly. In Aceh, James Siegel

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase is Marsden's, cited in Chapter Seven above, from *The History of Sumatra*, pp.340-341.

suggests, royal signs were valued "despite what those signs and documents said".<sup>2</sup> Our examination of the way in which *surat cap* were used in anti-Dutch rebellions suggests that, at least in certain contexts, the contents of Minangkabau letters were not unimportant. The signifiers issued by Raja Sakti appear to have been invested with a meaning which was closely linked to their actual contents.

However contingent meanings and readings may have been, the existence of a coherent body of texts invites us to probe the language they used. This chapter, therefore, will concentrate on what Minangkabau kings said in their letters. Formulaic, pompous and repetitive as these seemed to Europeans, they nevertheless encapsulated the ruler's message and presented it within a regular structure. Thus each letter presents the divine origins of Minangkabau sovereignty and, in most cases, this is linked to the creation of the world itself. Secondly the letters articulate the geographic sphere within which the ruler's words were broadcast and they describe the quality of royal messages and the manner of their transmission. Thirdly they provide proofs, signs of the power that Minangkabau kings receive through God, and which those who heard the message must acknowledge. Finally each letter contains a sanction, a curse which enjoined belief and threatened destruction of those who disobeyed.

Within this structure we can discern a marked consistency of expression. A similar vocabulary was used in letters from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries and key themes are elaborated in all the letters. The following pages will examine three of the most important of these themes by exploring the language of space, the language of abundance and the language of *kebesaran* in Minangkabau *surat cap*.

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<sup>2</sup> James Siegel, *Shadow and Sound: The Historical Thought of a Sumatran People* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 20.

## The Language of Space

In her book on Islamic revivalism in Sumatra Christine Dobbin draws attention to a local map of Sumatra described by S. Muller in his *Reizen en Onderzoekingen in Sumatra*. The map was drawn by a Malay in the early nineteenth century, and it depicted Gunung Merapi, in Minangkabau, lying in the middle of the island and around it, in concentric circles, were drawn the three foremost districts of the old Minangkabau kingdom. The remaining regions of the island were irregularly attached to these circles. The hill chains were also depicted stretching out from the centre in networks over the land.<sup>3</sup> To what extent does this map reflect a broader local perception of the relationship between the Minangkabau centre and the rest of Sumatra?

Part of the function of kingship in Minangkabau, according to some commentators, was to unify and define the sphere of the Alam Minangkabau. But what did the Alam mean, and how did the Minangkabau think about this relationship? How were political structures related to the Sumatran terrain and what sort of spatial categories were developed to articulate this relationship? Some answers to these questions can be found in Minangkabau royal utterances.

One of the most striking features of Minangkabau *surat cap* is the way the main text of the Malay letters was encircled or headed by a group of medallions, inscribed with the names of lesser rulers of Sumatran coastal centres. For local people who were unable to read the letters this design would have carried its own message. The ruler's large seal was surrounded by a group of these smaller pseudo-seals and, in some cases, the text of the letter, the ruler's words, were themselves encircled by the

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<sup>3</sup> Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 1. The citation is from S. Muller, *Reizen en Onderzoekingen in Sumatra*, 'S Gravenhage: K. Fuhri, 1855, p. 123 and the map was drawn in Natal, north west Sumatra.

medallions.

The design of royal seals and letters was by no means random or arbitrary. A comparison here may be made with the state seal of Aceh, the Cap Sikureueng or "ninefold seal". This was placed at the head of the Sarakata, or edicts, which Acehnese Sultans bestowed upon local chiefs.<sup>4</sup> The Acehnese royal seal itself was composed of a group of eight medallions containing the names of past Sultans surrounding a central medallion which was inscribed with the name of the reigning Sultan.<sup>5</sup>

The type of circular arrangement used appears to have been widespread in the Islamic world. Chinese ceramics destined for an Islamic market incorporated a similar design and the same pattern can also be found on Persian artefacts.<sup>6</sup> The patterns of Arabic calligraphy and Islamic artistic expression tended towards the enclosure of writing within medallions, lozenges, margins and other defined shapes. Hence the elaboration of the Bismillah within many diverse shapes and forms.<sup>7</sup> The close association between the development of Arabic script and the transmission of divine revelation contributed to the holy power of the written word. Thus, according to the

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<sup>4</sup> Parallels between these Sarakata and Minangkabau Surat Cap are discussed below.

<sup>5</sup> This is illustrated in Plate 12. See Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehnese*, p. 129. G.P. Rouffaer suggested that this design was based upon the seal of the Mughal emperors, an argument which was accepted by Snouck Hurgronje but questioned by Brakel who was more inclined to detect Hindu influence. See G. P. Rouffaer, "De Hindostansche Oorsprong van het 'Negenvoudig' Sultans-Zegel van Atjeh", *BKI*, vol. 59 (1906), pp. 349-83; C. Snouck Hurgronje, "Aanteekeningen op G. P. Rouffaer's Opstel over Atjehsche Soeltanszegels", *BKI*, vol. 66 (1907), pp. 52-6; L. F. Brakel, "State and Statecraft in 17th Century Aceh", in A. Reid and L. Castles (eds.), *Pre-Colonial State Systems in Southeast Asia*, Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1975, pp.64-5.

<sup>6</sup> See Yasin Hamid Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1978, p. 121 for an illustration of a Persian battle standard in the shape of a hand. Within the palm sit twelve inscribed medallions encircling a central medallion. A set of Chinese bowls incorporating the medallion pattern is held in the National Museum in Jakarta. Similar designs on Arabic manuscripts can be found in Abdel Kebir Khatibi and Mohammed Sijelmassi, *The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy*, New York: Rizzoli, 1976, pages 83 and 205.

<sup>7</sup> For examples of the range of designs incorporating the Bismillah see Safadi, *Ibid.*, pp. 32-40.



ACEHNESE ROYAL SEAL

authors of a work on Islamic calligraphy, the Arabic language occurring in the Koran is considered by Muslims to be a miracle, with an absolute and divine status.<sup>8</sup> The importance of the written word in Islamic societies is reflected in the use of inscription on amulets, clothing, and seals, and in the design of elaborate signatures, like the Ottoman Tugra, as devices to enclose and concentrate potent words.<sup>9</sup>

The arrangement of medallions around Minangkabau *surat cap* may have been influenced by the Acehese seal therefore, but the symbolic deployment of script was also a general feature of Islamic society, particularly the Ottoman empire, and we do not need to search for a single source of influence.<sup>10</sup> The Minangkabau arrangement, moreover, has an important geographic component which is absent from the Acehese seal. While the Acehese ruler's name is surrounded by his predecessors, Minangkabau royal words are surrounded by the names of the ruler's descendants who founded kingdoms in the frontier regions. This list of coastal kingdoms appears to inscribe the periphery of the Minangkabau royal sphere. The arrangement offers, in effect, a map of polities centred upon the Minangkabau kingdom and it serves to emphasize Minangkabau's centrality in Sumatran geography. Like the spokes of a wheel Minangkabau influence is depicted as radiating from the centre to the coast: to Aceh, Pariaman, Inderapura, Sungai Paguh, Palembang, Jambi, Siak, Rokan, and

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<sup>8</sup> Abdel Kebir Khatibi and Mohammed Sijelmassi, *The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy*, pages, 28 and 35. It is often remarked that the absence of an anthropomorphic religious imagery led to a concentration on inscription as a focus for devotion in Islam, but Khatibi and Sijelmassi refute this suggestion, pages 28 and 192.

<sup>9</sup> The Tugra was the monogram of the Ottoman sultans. Under Suleiman the Magnificent these became highly developed works of art. Ottoman sultans also possessed inscribed clothing such as talismanic shirts, decorated with many enclosed sections of text in different shapes. Both Tugra and talismanic shirts are illustrated in the Catalogue of an exhibition entitled "The Age of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent", Sydney: International Cultural Corporation of Australia Ltd., 1990. Tugra are also illustrated in J. M. Rodgers, *Islamic Art and Design 1500-1700*, London: British Museum Publications, 1983, pp. 45-7.

<sup>10</sup> In several of the *surat cap* eight to nine lesser medallions are used, which may suggest a parallel. North Sumatra was an early locus for the absorption of Islam, and the evidence suggests that Islam was carried inland from the coastal regions to the Minangkabau centre.

Banten and from these centres to lesser regions.<sup>11</sup>

This conjunction between the geographical entity of Sumatra and the Minangkabau ruler's sphere is important. Most of these surrounding polities are located on the coast and they demarcate, in effect, the coastline of Sumatra itself. Geographic boundaries and territorial definitions were rarely articulated in pre-modern Malay writing.<sup>12</sup> In Sumatra, perhaps because of the very fact that it was an island, there is a greater stress upon the physical entity, the island as such.<sup>13</sup> Minangkabau rulers asserted a moral and spiritual authority over the coastal regions and the way in which these claims were framed was related to the spatial contours of the island and, incidentally, to patterns of Minangkabau migration. Minangkabau is unusual in having a specific term, the Alam, to indicate the sphere of Minangkabau influence. To what extent was the idea of the Alam Minangkabau related to territorial definitions of Sumatra in Minangkabau royal letters and how did *surat cap* articulate the spatial relationship between the highland centre and the coast?

A number of names for the island of Sumatra occur in local sources. These include Andalas, Pulau Perca and Pulau Emas. All of these appear in Minangkabau *surat cap*, but they are used in different contexts which allow us to draw some conclusions about their significance.

Andalas appears in a variety of sources as a name for Sumatra or for part of

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<sup>11</sup> Banten, of course, was not a Sumatran kingdom, but it did exercise suzerainty over an important part of south Sumatra.

<sup>12</sup> The Malay Kerajaan was usually centred upon the ruler. As A. C. Milner points out, "territorial borders were often unknown" and "the actual location of a Malay state... appears to have been a matter of relatively little importance", *Kerajaan*, p. 8. In Sumatra, however, the delineation of geographic boundaries may have played a more important role, see Drakard, *A Malay Frontier*, pp. 177-8.

<sup>13</sup> The claims by seventeenth century Minangkabau rulers to lordship over the coastal regions and the whole of Sumatra are mentioned in VOC sources see, for instance, SWK 1683 VOC 1386, f. 1009r.



the island.<sup>14</sup> This name is rarely mentioned in *surat cap*, but when it does occur it is a name for the whole island, usually in the form Pulau Andalas.<sup>15</sup> One letter from Kerinci refers to the Minangkabau king as owner of Pulau Andalas, and another refers to the west coast of Pulau Andalas.<sup>16</sup>

Pulau Perca is used in several Minangkabau texts as a name for the whole island.<sup>17</sup> The origins of the name are uncertain as is its precise meaning.<sup>18</sup> In the *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* Pulau Perca appears as an earlier name for Minangkabau before the region was attacked by Majapahit and won its new name of Minangkabau.<sup>19</sup> In Minangkabau *surat cap* the name Pulau Perca is closely associated with the Sumatran coastline. It occurs specifically at the end of letters in passages which describe the regions to which the ruler's message might be conveyed.

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<sup>14</sup> Pires described Andalas as occupying the southern part of Sumatra, between Tulang Bawang and Pariaman. Cortesao, *Suma Oriental*, Vol. I, p.136 and p.159, n.1. In the Raffles 18 text of *Sejarah Melayu*, "Andelas" is mentioned in a way which suggests that it might have been the whole of Sumatra and an equivalent of Minangkabau. Brown, *Malay Annals*, pp.14-5 and Winstedt, *Sejarah Melayu*, p.56. In the eighteenth century Valentijn suggested that "Andelis" was a local name for the entity which Europeans knew as Sumatra. *Oud en Nieuw*, Vol. V, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> The van Hasselt MS. mentions "sekalian Andalas", ll. 27-8.

<sup>16</sup> Or. 414 and Dulaurier. In the Dulaurier text the name is qualified by the Arabic term mahrasayn, which suggests garrison or guard houses and may refer to the Dutch presence in west Sumatra. This term is also linked to the word Andalas in two eighteenth century Sumatran letters collected by Dulaurier. *Chrestomathie Malaye*, p. 31, n.3.

<sup>17</sup> Toorn, *Kaba Tjindur Mato*, p. 13 and Netscher, "Verzameling van Overleveringen", p 54.

<sup>18</sup> European travellers noted that this was a local terms for the island. In Minangkabau dictionaries *perca* is spelt *patjo* and *partjo*, see Pamoentjak, *Kamoes Bahasa Minangkabau*, p. 181 and van der Toorn, *Minangkabausche-Maleisch-Nederlandsch Woordenboek*, p. 253. *Perca* indicates rags, tatters or strips of cloth and Marsden speculates that this may have been a perception of the east Sumatran coastline, Wilkinson, *Malay-English Dictionary*, p. 885 and Marsden, *The History of Sumatra*, p. 12. See also W. L. de Sturler, *Gebeid van Palembang*, Groningen: J. Oomkens, 1843, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*, Diusahkan oleh Russell Jones, Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti, 1987, pp. 71-5, Jones comments that the name appears as an equivalent of the Minangkabau region. Local tradition relates that the name Minangkabau is derived from *menang* (to win) and *kerbau* (buffalo) because a *kerbau* representing Pulau Perca overcame that of Majapahit.

In this context the name is used consistently with the word *keliling* (around).<sup>20</sup> Thus the letters relate that their message is intended

for all people within the surrounds of this Pulau Perca  
(segala orang di dalam sekeliling daerah Sepulau Perca ini. [Van Hasselt, lines 28-9]).

The oath at the end of the letters was said to apply to all Minangkabau subjects and if a subject obeyed the ruler's words then

wherever he may live in whatever negeri it will be safe. This applies all around Pulau Perca. Around the coast or inland these words will be true. (...dan barang di mana negeri tempat duduknya selamat, baik keliling Pulau Perca, baik segala keliling laut dan darat tempat kota yang sebenarnya. [Dulaurier/Newbold/Korn]).

The encircling nature of the concept Pulau Perca is emphasised by a recitation, in the *surat cap*, of the numerous places to which a letter might be carried or its contents known. Thus the letter from Padang Nunang in Rao states that the Yang Dipertuan of Padang Nunang was descended, in the past, from the eldest child of Yang Dipertuan Sati (Sakti) in Pagaruyung.

If anyone in the Alam Pulau Perca does not know this, let them now be informed including all the rajas all around this Pulau Perca. This includes all the rajas in the region of Negeri Aces [Aceh], all the rajas in the region of Negeri Siak, all the rajas in the region of Negeri Inderagiri, all the rajas in the area of Negeri Jambi and all the rajas in Negeri Palembang and all the rajas on the sea and the Company whose rule is harsh in all the ports which surround this Pulau Perca.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> These terms are mentioned in the following manuscripts: van Hasselt, lines 28-9; Rao, lines 22 and 25; Dulaurier/Newbold/Korn, line 18; ML 483 line 67. The terms do not appear within the text of Or. 4818 but the royal seal on top of the letter reads: "Sultan Sri Maharaja Diraja ibn Sultan Hidayat Allah yang mempunyai takhta kerajaan dalam 'alam Minangkabau ...Sultan sekeliling Pulau Perca ini ....". The Barus manuscript mentioned in Chapter seven refers to "Sekalian raja raja yang beketurunan yang berasal dari Minang Kerbau bernama Kota Pagar Ruyung, maka dari sanalah asal kerajaan dan kemuliaan segala orang ber'adat yang memegang hukum syara' dan yang meramaikan segala Pulau Perca yang menerangi segala hukum pada tiap-tiap seorang raja-raja yang turun dari Minang Kerbau kota Pagaruyong".

<sup>21</sup> Rao MS. lines 22-5. Jikalau belum tahu 'alam Pulau Perca ini sekarang hendaklah di katuhui segala raja-raja yang berkuliling pulau perca ini baik segala Raja-raja nan dalam daerah Negeri Aces baik segala raja-raja nan dalam daerah negeri sy-y-ng baik segala raja-raja nan dalam daerah negeri Inderagiri baik segala raja-raja nan dalam daerah Negeri Jambi baik segala raja-raja nan di dalam negeri Palembang baik segala raja-raja nan di laut serta

Not all letters list exactly these Sumatran coastal centres at the end of the letter and some include a much wider range of places extending to Java and the Malay Peninsula. Nevertheless the idea that Pulau Perca is an entity which relates to the perimeter of the Minangkabau sphere is enforced by the consistent association of Pulau Perca with the word *keliling* in all the letters identified here.<sup>22</sup>

Other spatial categories which occur in the *surat cap* genre appear to operate within this periphery. The names Pulau Emas and Alam Minangkabau often occur in association in the letters and Pulau Emas is also closely linked with *kerajaan*. Thus many letters describe the first ruler of Minangkabau, Maharaja Diraja, as descending to

the land (*tanah*) of Pagaruyung, who possesses the throne of sovereignty (*takhta kerajaan*) in Pulau Emas, and whose justice flows out within the Alam Minangkabau.<sup>23</sup>

In some contexts the name Pulau Emas is used for the island of Sumatra, but in *surat cap* its equivalence seems to be bounded, not in terms of territory, but by the category of kingship. The name is not mentioned except in relation to *kerajaan*.<sup>24</sup> There is also a strong association between gold and kingship in the *surat*. The terrain itself is depicted as composed of gold and the letters list mountains and rivers of gold as part

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kompeni yang keras memerintah dalam semua bandar yang berkeliling Pulau Perca ini.

<sup>22</sup> In a recent thesis on the Riau archipelago Vivien Wee has observed that the term *pulau* appears to be used to convey the relationship between two "Perceptibly different substances - land and sea in the one case, forest and rice fields in the other." Wee suggests that *pulau* conveys the notion of "surroundedness" and this is consistent with the association between *keliling* and Pulau Perca in the Surat Cap. Both Wilkinson and Wee comments that it is usual, in Malay, for larger islands to be referred to as *tanah*. Vivien Wee, *Melayu: Hierarchies of Being in Riau*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1985, p. 80.

<sup>23</sup> ML 483. "Sebagai tinggal kepada Sultan Syeri Maharaja Diraja; ialah yang turun ke tanah Pagaruyung yang mempunyai takhta kerajaan di dalam Pulau Emas yang melimpahkan 'adilnya di dalam 'alam Minangkabau".

<sup>24</sup> This occurs in the following manuscripts: ML 483, lines 41 and 46-7; Sungai Paguh MS. line 43; Dulaurier/Newbold/Korn; Or. 2241 line 12.

of the ruler's possessions.<sup>25</sup> The royal *kebesaran*, moreover, include numerous gold objects which are said to embody sacred power. Pulau Emas may have been a very old name for Sumatra, reflected in the sanskrit name, Suvarnadvīpa (Island of Gold).

The impression conveyed in these Minangkabau letters is that Pulau Emas is a royal space within the Alam Minangkabau, and within Pulau Perca itself, from which the attributes of Minangkabau *kerajaan* spread out towards the rest of the Alam. The word *pulau*, in this context, may be intended, like Pulau Langkapuri, as an island of space, bounded by its particular qualities rather than by water. From this golden island of kingship justice, *kerajaan*, *adat* and other qualities flowed outwards to the rest of the Alam like the gold which flowed from central Sumatra to the east and west coasts.

All three terms, Pulau Perca, Pulau Emas and Alam Minangkabau, were probably interchangeable to some extent, but the way they are used in Minangkabau *surat cap* can be represented graphically by a series of radiating circles not unlike the map described by Muller. Daulat Yang Dipertuan resided in Tanah/Negeri Pagaruyung within Pulau Emas, which was encompassed by the Alam Minangkabau, which was itself set within a radiating periphery partly enclosed within the encircling entity of Pulau Perca, a concept which appears to have been congruent with the Sumatran coastline itself.

This patterning is reflected in the map of peripheral centres represented in the medallions on Minangkabau letters. The terminology here may itself be significant. In many *surat cap* the inscription within the medallions begins with the words "Inilah

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<sup>25</sup> Many of the letters relate that "ialah Sultan yang mempunyai sungai emas", van Hasselt l. 22; see also Or. 2241 l. 21; ML. 483 l. 55; Sungai Paguh, lines 2-3, 13 and 17; ML. 332 and Dulaurier/Newbold Korn; Tambo Asa, line 30.

bab Sultan di Negeri..." (this section concerns the Sultan of ...).<sup>26</sup> Edwin Loeb has described the most commonly named centres as the "eight babs, the entrances and exits to the kingdom".<sup>27</sup> The Arabic word *bab* does signify entrance or gate, but it is also commonly used in Malay literature for chapter or section divisions within a written work.<sup>28</sup> Thus in those Minangkabau *Undang-Undang* and in *surat cap* where the names of peripheral rulers are not enclosed within medallions but listed in the text itself, the same wording is used.<sup>29</sup> That the same idea was important in the eighteenth century is reflected in a letter from Inderma Syah to the Padang commander in 1717 in which he refers to "our servants from all the nine divisions who remain obedient to us by night and day".<sup>30</sup> Whether the term *bab* was first used to suggest the gateways to the Minangkabau kingdom or to indicate a literary subdivision is not clear and perhaps it hardly matters. Within the textual encoding of Sumatran/Minangkabau space found in the *surat cap* genre the two senses are not inconsistent and both meanings could apply. With a Minangkabau cap in the centre and the names of the coastal sultanates placed around the ruler's words the physical face of *surat cap* manuscripts inscribe the island itself as a text.

The impulse towards a delineation of the Minangkabau sphere is apparent in the enumeration of the peripheral *bab*. The lesser rulers named were all said to be

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<sup>26</sup> Some of the *surat-cap* use a different form of words. The medallions in the van Hasselt text open "Sultan yang mula-mula jadi raja di negeri...". Cod. Or 2241 which is a *jawi* copy of the original MS. has the words "Inilah mula-mula jadi raja" within the text, although a series of lines of text at the top of the page indicate where the medallions were and these read "Inilah bab raja di negeri."

<sup>27</sup> Loeb, *Sumatra*, p. 98.

<sup>28</sup> Wilkinson, *A Malay-English Dictionary (Romanised)*, sv. *bab*; see also H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953, p. 52.

<sup>29</sup> An example is the Sungai Paguh text from Balun where newly introduced subjects are marked with the words "Inilah bab Yang Patuan di..", as, for instance in lines 30-4 of the MS.

<sup>30</sup> SWK 1717 VOC 1883, f. 32.

descended from the Yang Dipertuan of Pagaruyung and, through them, Minangkabau sovereignty spread out to surrounding regions. Each outlying centre is presented as a microcosm of the radiating Minangkabau centre. A typical example would be this statement from the Dulaurier/Newbold/Korn text:

This is the section of the Sultan of Jambi named Baginda Tuan who is a child of the Yang Dipertuan in Pagaruyung. This was the beginning of rulership in Negeri Jambi flowing outwards towards Chi Jambi of the nine *lurah*.<sup>31</sup>

In this mapping the significance of the Sumatran coastline is emphasized and that demarcation seems to take precedence over the actual patterns of Minangkabau history and migration. Thus, instead of depicting intermediate centres spreading Minangkabau kingship to the coast, as in the Patapahan-Siak, Kuantan-Inderagiri relationships, some of the *bab* relate that Minangkabau rule flowed from the coast into the intermediate interior as in the Jambi *bab* just quoted. The logic here would appear to be, not only an impulse towards mapping the circumference of the island of Sumatra, but also one of kingship. With the exception of the Sungai Paguh-10 Bandar example, all the usual centres named in the letters were established as coastal sultanates even if, like Banten and Palembang, they were never ruled by Minangkabau kings. The pattern, then, is of the Minangkabau ruler encircled by a ring of lesser Sultans who could trace their origins to Minangkabau.

The image of the Minangkabau king as overlord among rulers is expressed in his Sanskrit title, Maharaja Diraja (great lord of kings). This was a appellation used by the Srivijayan overlords and, among his other illustrious titles, Adityawarman was also referred to, in thirteenth century inscriptions, as *varmadeva maharajadhiraja*

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<sup>31</sup> "Inilah bab Sultan di Jambi yang bernama Baginda Tuan anak Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung jua adanya. Inilah mula-mula jadi raja di Negeri Jambi melimpah kepada ci' Jambi sembilan lurah".

(lord of protection, great lord of kings).<sup>32</sup> This imperial emphasis on the ruler as lord over other kings was common in early Southeast Asian kingdoms, but after the acceptance of Islam it is less evident in the rhetoric of Malay rulers. Iskandar Muda of Aceh, for instance, claimed lordship of places in Sumatra and beyond, rather than over other kings.<sup>33</sup> In Minangkabau the Indic emphasis on a galaxy of lesser rulers surrounding the supreme lord appears in a distinctive combination with Islamic ideas. In a seventeenth century letter to the VOC, for example, Inderma Syah described himself as owner of a "crown which was like a parasol before which all kings bowed".<sup>34</sup> In another letter from the same year the king is described as "Emperor of the world", "king over all kings", under whom "all men are shadowed as if by a sunshade".<sup>35</sup>

The language of space was thus an important part of the royal message articulated in the *surat cap* genre. The patterning of centre-periphery relations, articulated in the spatial language of *surat cap*, partly suggests the classical mandala arrangement of early Indian and Southeast Asian polities. The image of Sumatran political space inscribed in the letters conveys the idea of a core and a container which are the central elements in an enclosed mandala pattern.<sup>36</sup> De Josselin de Jong has shown how the Minangkabau-influenced states of Negeri Sembilan were organized around a royal core at Sri Menanti. Clearly this general model was also important in

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<sup>32</sup> H. Kern, "De Wij-inscriptie op het Amoghapaca-beeld van Padang Candi (Midden-Sumatra) 1269 caka", in *Verspreide Geschriften*, vol. 7 's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1917, p. 166, line 15 of the inscription. I am grateful to Dr I. Mabbett for his advice on these terms.

<sup>33</sup> Shellabear, "An Account of some of the oldest Malay MSS", pp. 127-8.

<sup>34</sup> SWK 1691 VOC 1488, f. 446r.

<sup>35</sup> SWK 1691 VOC 1485, f. 524v.

<sup>36</sup> See S.J. Tambiah, Tambiah, S.J. *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 102.

Minangkabau as Tambiah himself has noticed.<sup>37</sup>

Yet the emphasis in *surat cap* does not rest upon the cosmological principles and numerological patterning which are important features in other Southeast Asian kingdoms. Loeb described eight *bab*, but the number of medallions which feature on *surat cap* varies. Rather the point of the spatial emphasis in Minangkabau letters seems to be to recite the periphery and through language to affirm its connection with the centre. By means of inscription and subsequent recitation the text of Sumatran space was made manifest in *surat cap* and the crucial Minangkabau link between interior and coast was recalled and placed in the ruler's keeping.

### The Language of Abundance

What were the qualities which radiated from the centre to the Alam Minangkabau and how do Minangkabau letters express this? The language of dispersion in Minangkabau letters is one of abundance. The term *melimpah* (to abound, to overflow) is used in all the letters to express the way in which royal favour was spread to Minangkabau subjects. This is a familiar term in Malay *hikayat* in which terms for royal bounty, such as *kurnia* and *anugerah*, often appear. The Minangkabau letters mention *kurnia* in relation to God's bounty, but *anugerah* is not used. The qualities and attributes which flowed out to their subjects were more specific. Justice (*adil*), for instance, is consistently linked with the word *melimpah*, often in association with *kemurahan* (generosity) and these, too, are qualities which are commonly attributed to Malay rulers.<sup>38</sup> Thus most letters contain the following

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<sup>37</sup> Tambiah cites de Josselin de Jong's conclusions from *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan*, Chapter IX. He also refers to the resolution of Minangkabau disputes over land ownership, *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>38</sup> See Milner, *Kerajaan*, *passim*.



statement which comes after a description of Iskandar Zulkarnain's greatness.

That is the greatness of the three brother rajas whose justice and generosity, moreover, flow out to all the rulers who are below them who take possession of the blessings and intercession of Muhammad who is dear to God the all-compassionate.<sup>39</sup>

In some letters it is this justice which again flows outwards from those lesser Rajas to their own peripheral spheres. Thus the medallions surrounding the royal *cap* in MS OR 4818 carry a tail of text which states, after the ruler's name and his descent from Pagaruyung,

This is the first raja in negeri Inderapura and his justice (*adil*) and *kerajaan* flow outwards to Moko-Moko.

This was more than a conventional expression. The Minangkabau ruler's role as an arbiter of disputes is something which is mentioned in nineteenth century colonial studies, and de Josselin de Jong has emphasized the way in which Minangkabau kings acted to mediate and harmonize phratry and other tensions in Minangkabau society. The importance of this function in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been demonstrated in the course of this study. Not only did the kings act as a balancing force; they also intervened and mediated in inter-nagari disputes. According to colonial reports an envoy of the ruler would place a royal *payung* (or parasol) in the middle of a field between two groups of disputants, thus signifying the ruler's intervention.<sup>40</sup> Like their nineteenth century successors, seventeenth century rulers advertised this role in their letters. In one letter to the VOC Inderma Syah referred to himself as

an exalted and powerful lord who gives delight to all rulers and is supported by them in order to offer words of justice to two parties, who is adored by all rulers.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Dulaurier MS. "Itulah kebesaran raja yang bertiga bersaudara, lagi melimpahkan 'adilnya dan kemurahannya pada segala hamba Allah dan pada segala raja-raja yang di bawahnya mengambil berkat dan syafaat Muhammad Habib alrahman."

<sup>40</sup> Willinck, *Het Rechtsleven bij de Minangkabausche Maleiers*, p. 73.

<sup>41</sup> SWK 1725 VOC 2013 f. 108.

As several *surat cap* relate, Maharaja Diraja, was the first ruler of Minangkabau who

came down to the land of Pagaruyung and possessed the throne of sovereignty in Pulau Emas and whose justice flowed outwards in the Alam Minangkabau.<sup>42</sup>

Whose justice did the king bestow on the Minangkabau world? The *surat cap* show that justice emanated from God and was transmitted to his servants through the intercession of his apostles whose representatives on earth were the descendants of Iskandar. The three rulers of Minangkabau, Rum and China were recipients of God's blessings, which flowed to them in a style which parallels their own overflowing generosity towards their subjects. In the letters God's blessings issue forth on a spring of water, they flow on a fragrant scent and a breeze from paradise. These emanated from God much as justice and blessings flowed out from his representatives. The available Malay letters express this in one of two ways.

The Dulaurier/Newbold/Korn letter, ML. 483 and one of the texts in KITLV Or. 414 all contain the same version. Their language recalls Koranic imagery in which the waters flowing through heaven are often mentioned.<sup>43</sup>

It is related that a spring of water flowed in the gardens of paradise. Vegetation sprouted on earth and breathing creatures came to life because of a fragrant scent within the hall of the most illustrious ruler (yang maha mulia). Then, like ambergris and musk, the royal presence of the three brother rulers was blessed.<sup>44</sup>

It is, perhaps, significant that this description occurs in the ML. 483 manuscript on which the royal *balai* or *istana* is also pictured.

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<sup>42</sup> ML. 483.

<sup>43</sup> The rivers and springs of Paradise are frequently mentioned in the Koran. See, for instance, s. xv, verse 45 and s. xviii, verse 32.

<sup>44</sup> Dulaurier MS. "Maka tersebutlah mata air di dalam surga janna al-n'aim. Maka bertumbuhlah segala tanam-tanaman di dalam bumi maka hiduplah segala nafas hamba Allah sebab membauan-bauan yang harum di balai yang maha mulia. Maka adalah laksananya 'ambar dan kesturi berkat daulat hadrat sultan yang tiga bersaudara." See also the Korn collection text, OR 414 and ML 483, line 37.

In a larger group of *surat cap* God's blessings flowed out to the three original rulers in a slightly different way. After mentioning the names of the three brother rulers the texts related that

There then blew a breath of all-compassionate wind from the gardens of the heavenly Paradise. There wafted a scent whose fragrance was that of the original incense and this beautiful scent opened the hearts of the true. Much greater than the lustre of the sun and moon is the Sultan who possesses Pagaruyung, the abode of peace, who alone receives the bounty of the most exalted God.<sup>45</sup>

We have seen already that an eighteenth century letter from Suruaso was said to be carried on a sweet smelling wind which wafted from the gardens of Paradise and which could penetrate men's minds or hearts.<sup>46</sup> It would seem that the same wording was carried across the years from 1724 to 1800, when Cod Or. 4818 may have been written. Another letter, sent from Ahmad Syah of Pagaruyung to Batavia in 1679 includes an even closer parallel with the Malay text. The Dutch translation of this letter rendered the text as follows:

Moreover, as this letter from Sultan Ahmad Syah is handed over to Captain Moor so a sweet wind shall come from the heavenly garden and blow over the orchards of Paradise whereby a naturally beautiful scent would increase in order to open the interior of the heart like the rays of the sun and the moon.<sup>47</sup>

These images of blessings and royal words wafting outwards on scented wind parallel the outflow of justice, generosity and blessings issuing from Pagaruyung to the Alam Minangkabau. A pattern is thus established in the letters which links divine outpourings with those of the king. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the same

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<sup>45</sup> Or 4818, lines 4-5: "Maka bertiuplah angin nafas al-rahman daripada pihak tanam-tanaman daripada syurga janat al-firdaus. Maka terkibar-kibarliah baun yang harum narwastu yang asli. Maka tebukalah syam rupa [?] di kalib yang hakiki terlebihlah daripada cahaya bulan dan matahari, ialah Sultan yang menaruhkan Pagaruyung dar al-aman jadi sendirinya dikaruniakan Allah taala." The same basic text is also found in Ml. 332, in Or. 2241, lines 9-10, in Or. 5825, lines 8-9 and in the Sungai Pauh text line 18, Tambo nan Selapan, line 10 and Tambo Asa, lines 16-20.

<sup>46</sup> The Malay term was probably *hati*.

<sup>47</sup> *Dagh-Register*, Vol. 27 (1679), p. 32.

imagery is frequently used in the Koran. There the winds are often mentioned as a "sign from God", as "heralds of glad tidings", transmitters of God's mercy and "emissaries" spreading his message.<sup>48</sup> The Koran also makes frequent mention of God's liberality. He is "Lord of Bounties", a giver of justice, guardian and protector".<sup>49</sup>

When these generous qualities are attributed to Southeast Asian rulers scholars often associate them with Buddhist ideals and with the Bodhisattva image of ruler as helper. But Islam too puts great emphasis on God's mercy and favour towards his subjects. Thus the caliph, in the medieval Muslim world, was believed to "radiate God's blessings"<sup>50</sup> and Malay rulers were often known for being just (*adil*) and generous (*murah*).<sup>51</sup>

In Minangkabau letters royal words are also depicted as part of this outpouring. Subjects are said to request the ruler's words or commands (*titah*). In several *surat cap* one of the *kebesaran* listed is a bell called Semudru Sumbing Hati, which signals to the people to present themselves and request the royal word (*memohon titah*). Moreover most letters also contain a concluding passage which states that the ruler's word or command (*titah yang dipertuan nan sati*) is to be conveyed throughout Sumatra.

Verily these are the words of Daulat Yang Dipertuan in negeri Pagaruyung to all his children and to his descendants, to all of the great men in their seats, that is Bendahara in Sungai Tarab and Baginda Muda in Suruaso and

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<sup>48</sup> *The Glorious Koran*, s.vii, v.57; s.xxx, v.46, v. 48 and v. 51; s.lxxvii, vv.1-5. Springs of water are also a common image in the Koran. Two editions of the *Glorious Koran* were used in this and the following note; they are the translation and commentary by Abdallah Yousuf Ali, printed and published by the "Call of Islam Society" Libyan Arab Republic; and *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, An explanatory translation by Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, New York: Mentor, n.d..

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, s.ii, vv. 1-2 and v. 257; s.iii, v. 150 and v.174; s.xvii, vv.20-1; s.xcvi, v.3; s.lii, v.28; s.x, v. 32;

<sup>50</sup> Milner, "Islam and Malay Kingship", p. 53 n.81.

<sup>51</sup> The word *adil* entered Malay from Arabic, see the discussion of these two terms in Milner, *Kerajaan*, p. 40.

Mankhudum in ....and Tuan Patih in Padang Ganting and to all the regions and all of the great Andalas. All learned men and common people are ordered to make these known to everyone within the circumference of this Pulau Perca.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, in the seventeenth century, we have seen the ruler's sent their *titah*, or commands, to the Dutch and to the people of the west coast in letters which the VOC referred to as "*bevel brieven*".

The Yang Dipertuan spoke to his subjects in these letters, but few would have read them in the private way that we understand reading. *Surat cap* would almost certainly have been read aloud when they were brought to Malay communities or when a prince wished to call upon Minangkabau sovereignty.<sup>53</sup> How did the letters sound?

Two points are of particular relevance here. One is the use of Arabic in the *surat cap* and the other is the way that the letters list the insignia or the signs of greatness (*kebesaran*) in the possession of the Minangkabau kings.

### The Language of Greatness

All the *surat cap* open with several lines of Arabic praising God and including sayings (*firman*) from the Koran. In many these phrases are also distributed though the text of the letters themselves. In decorated texts, like ML 483 and the Sungai

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<sup>52</sup> Van Hasselt lines 26-9, "...ialah maka bahwasanya bertitah daulat yang pertuan di negeri Pagaruyung kepada segala anak-anaknya dan kepada sekalian cucunya kepada segala orang besar-besar yang amat kedudukannya ia'itu Bendahara di Sungai Tarab serta Baginda Muda di Syuruaso dan Mangkhudum di Sumanik serta di Tuan Kadi di Padang Ganting dan kepada segala lurah-lurah serta sekalian Andelas besyarnya dan kepada segala panditanya sekalian hamba rakyatnya menyuroh memberi tahuikan segala orang di dalam sekeliling daerah sepulau perca ini."

<sup>53</sup> An example of the way in which letters were read publicly in seventeenth century Malay society comes from the report of the VOC inspired embassy inland to Negeri in 1668. The letter was read aloud to the king and the reading was accompanied by the playing of gongs and musical instruments. SWK 1670 VOC 1272, f. 1013. Amin Sweeney has given detailed attention to the way in which written compositions, in pre-twentieth century Malay societies, drew on the patterns of oral composition and were intended for oral delivery. These ideas are discussed in Sweeney, *A Full Hearing*, see especially pp. 221-240.

Paguh manuscript, they are highlighted in red ink, and in the former God's name encircles the letter itself. Many Malay letters and texts also use Arabic in the same way and this may be regarded as a conventional feature of pre-modern court writing in Malay. It is important, however, that the element of conventionality should not obscure the impact of this sacred language in Malay letters. In the case of Minangkabau *surat cap*, which were clearly intended to have an effect on ordinary people, the fact that most would not understand Arabic, but would know it as the language of their prayers, would have contributed to the powerful impact of these letters when read aloud.<sup>54</sup> Arabic phrases and quotations from the Koran would have affirmed the sacred source of the ruler's words, a message which was repeated in many ways within the letters. *Surat cap*, like Or. 5283 and van Hasselt, and the Sungai Paguh MS carry a heading (*kepala surat*) in arabic, which reads *Kaul al-hak*, "the word is the truth". The truth was God's and believers were enjoined to accept it.

Another factor which would have affected the sound and impact of the letters is the use of patterned lists and formulaic language. When western writers have referred to the credulity of those who believed Minangkabau royal words and ridiculed the extravagant language of *surat cap* the feature they highlight is the presence of long lists of *kebesaran* contained in each letter. These lists are one of the most distinctive feature of the *surat cap* genre and a means by which Minangkabau letters can be identified. The items listed vary from three to four in some seventeenth century letters to up to thirty-seven in the nineteenth century *cap*. Both the consistency of key items and the frequency with which they are mentioned suggests that the *kebesaran* were

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<sup>54</sup> Benedict R. O'G. Anderson makes a similar point when he writes "Arabic was maintained as the language of "initiation" precisely because Arabic was not understood; the whole point of a spiritual ritual in an uncomprehended language is that it manifests power, and implies a deliberately nonrationalist mode of cognition." "The Languages of Indonesian Politics", in *Language and Power. Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 127.

crucial to the way in which Minangkabau sovereignty was conceived and broadcast in Sumatra.

One of the first points to make about these lists of regalia concerns their repetitive and formulaic structure. Each individual item is introduced with the same phrase,

ialah sultan yang menaruhkan kerbau Sibinuang Sati;  
ialah sultan yang menaruhkan ayam Biring Sangganani; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan sumurnya Siketang;  
ialah sultan yang menaruhkan kelapa Nira Bali;  
ialah sultan yang menaruhkan Lenggundi hitam jadi sendirinya...  
(he is the Sultan who has in his keeping...).

It is not only the lists of *kebesaran* which are organized in this fashion. The *bab* at the beginning of letters are presented in the same repetitive style, reading: "Inilah bab Sultan...etc." There is also a passage at the end of most letters which lists the places to which a letter might be carried and uses the formula "baik ke.." to introduce the various regions. Several letters read as follows:

Jikalau dibawanya lalu ke Siak dan Nilawan dan Patapahan baik ke Kampar Kiri ke Kampar Kanan jangan dianya dibinasakan atau di laut baik ke Palembang dan Inderagiri baik Rokam baik ke dusun Rambai Tembusi baik ke Batu Bara baik ke Pulau Pinang baik ke Melacca dan ke Kedah baik lalu ke Jawa ke Betawi baik ke Susu ke Telaboh baik lalu ke Tra dan ke Bangkahulu....<sup>55</sup>

The relentless naming process which occurs in these lists appears, at least in part, have been a device to order things: rulers, places and signs of power. However geographically disparate, or apparently diverse the listed items may have been in other contexts, in *surat cap* they are ordered on a discursive ground where Minangkabau kingship is the organising principle. We might say that the letters bring together and concentrate the elements of the kingdom for use on occasions when the idea of kingdom needed to be condensed for the purpose of dissemination. A similar sort of process appears to have been at work in early Javanese inscriptions. Vickers

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<sup>55</sup> Dulaurier MS., see also Rao MS. and Ml. 483.

suggests Javanese inscriptions naming diverse classes of people were a means of linking them within the category of the state.

The parties to inscriptions are thus bound together by a shared discourse about supernatural power, ritual practice and categories of person existing in the world.<sup>56</sup>

The paratactic arrangement of these lists would have added depth in concentrating the elements of their message. This sort of repetitive formula is often found in Malay *hikayat* and it is also common in poetry and ritual language.<sup>57</sup> In western Indonesia, and particularly in Sumatra, such patterning often occurs in *adat* sayings, *Kaba* and incantations.<sup>58</sup> As Sweeney and others have pointed out, these rhythmic passages act as mnemonic devices and they are a familiar feature of oral composition and delivery.<sup>59</sup> In the case of *surat cap* the point of interest is not that the letters were preserved in oral form, since by the seventeenth century they appear to have been transmitted in writing, but that their language is patterned in a style which would have had deep resonance in a society which, Sweeney argues, had a "strongly oral orientation".<sup>60</sup> As one eighteenth century letter from Suruaso states,

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<sup>56</sup> Adrian Vickers, "History and Social Structure in Ancient Java: A Review Article", *RIMA* vol. 20, 2 (Summer 1986), p. 179.

<sup>57</sup> It is close to the parallelism which is common in ritual language and is particularly evident in eastern Indonesia, see J. Fox (ed.) *To Speak in Pairs: Essays on the Ritual Languages of Eastern Indonesia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

<sup>58</sup> Amin Sweeney points to the prevalence of this sort of pattern in *panglipur lara* tales and *Kaba* from Sumatra and suggests that many literary texts from Sumatra are much closer to oral composition than the "classical" traditions of Malay literature, *A Full Hearing*, pp. 114-5.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter Four and passim., see also Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960, Chapter Three.

<sup>60</sup> Sweeney sees Minangkabau *Kaba* as evidence of a "transition from an oral to a written style". "[T]he written form of the *kaba* is strong evidence of the oral orientation of the society....the scribes were not merely concerned with recording the content of the tale...on the contrary, they preserved also the traditional oral style, an indication that this style was sufficiently meaningful and prestigious to be preserved in writing." Sweeney, *A Full Hearing*, p. 118.



the kings words had "a charming sound like music".<sup>61</sup>

Malay texts often enumerate items of regalia in the context of descriptions of royal ceremonies of obeisance (*menghadap*), installation, marriage, circumcision or for the reception of a letter. These ceremonies were participatory rituals which, in the act and in the retelling, served to "argue", as Geertz puts it, the link between kingship and cosmic forces and to involve individuals in a structured world where rank and status identity (*gelar* and *nama*) were exhibited and affirmed.<sup>62</sup> Minangkabau kings, by contrast, were isolated from those who dwelt outside their immediate vicinity in the highlands. Their role in the lives of their subjects was more remote than the rulers of Pahang, Johor or Bali and the opportunities for participatory rituals were fewer.

Nineteenth century Dutch sources relate that Minangkabau kings used to undertake ceremonial peregrinations through their sphere which followed a prescribed route. While some colonial scholars saw this as evidence of royal powerlessness, de Josselin de Jong argued that these journeys were "a means of cementing the union between Ruler and realm, and between different parts of the realm *inter se*."<sup>63</sup> Significantly royal *kebesaran* were also carried through the regions of the *Alam* as *tanda* (signs) of royal power.<sup>64</sup> In this way, it seems, sovereignty was shown or manifested in the regions by these signs which travelled on the king's behalf. The

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<sup>61</sup> SWK 1717 VOC 1883, f. 33.

<sup>62</sup> For the most thorough explanation of the meaning of ceremony in Malay societies see Milner, *Kerajaan*. The function of state ritual in Bali is examined by Geertz in *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali* Chapter Four.

<sup>63</sup> De Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan*, p. 109, he cites J. Ballot, "Het Inlandsch Bestuur in de Onderafdeeling Loeboe Sikaping en Rao, Afdeeling Loeboe Sikaping, Residentie Padangsche Bovenlanden", *TBB*, vol. xxviii, 1 (1905), p. 381 and Willinck, *Het Rechtsleven bij de Minangkabausche Maleiers*, p. 242. See also J.F.A. de Rooij, "De Positie der Volkshoofden in een gedeelte der Padangsche Bovenlanden", *IG*, vol. 12, 1 (1890), p. 637. None of the seventeenth and eighteenth century sources examined here mention these ritual journeys and they may have been a later development.

<sup>64</sup> See, for instance, Willinck, *Het Rechtsleven*, p. 242.

listing of regalia in the *surat cap* would have had the same effect. They were ritual in written form. The rhythmic repetition of these many wonderful signs of the king's greatness were *tanda*, proofs which argued the link between kingship and the cosmic forces in much the same way as royal ceremonial in other kingdoms.

In what way were these signs wonderful and why should they have been convincing marks of the ruler's powers? There are two directions from which this question can be approached. By examining the language of *kebesaran* itself, and by situating the items in a broader context of Minangkabau-Malay literature.

The language used to describe the Minangkabau *kebesaran* suggests that the powerful quality of some of the items listed rested in their independent existence and their direct origin from God. Some Malay letters, like ML. 483, describe how the *kebesaran* were conveyed to earth by God for Adam Khalifa Allah and his descendants.<sup>65</sup> It is a convention of most letters that a number of key items are described moving and acting on their own. Thus in the Or. 4818 text almost all the *kebesaran* are said to have come into being, or to act, alone by the grace of God ("*jadi sendirinya dikurniakan Allah*"). In other letters key items such as the loom, Tanun Sangsita Kala, the sword, Curek Simandang Giri, a pair of pincers and the burning mountain, Gunung Berapi/Merapi, are all said to act alone.<sup>66</sup> The message that items of *kebesaran* were derived from God is also conveyed in other ways. Objects are said to rest in the keeping of the Yang Dipertuan by divine decree ("*dengan takdir Allah*")<sup>67</sup> and some letters also include a piece of gold which, by the power of God, was shaped

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<sup>65</sup> See the text of this letter in the Appendix.

<sup>66</sup> See for instance, van Hasselt, Or. 2241 and Or. 4818 and Dulaurier.

<sup>67</sup> For instance, ML 332 and ML 483 and SWK 1717 VOC 1883, f. 34-5.

like a human.<sup>68</sup> The point of these *kebesaran* resting in the keeping of Minangkabau kings appears to be that they were themselves signs of God.

Beyond this message of divine influence which was embedded within the language of the *kebesaran*, many of the items would also have resonated with Sumatrans because they were familiar features in the storehouse of local knowledge. As Hendrick Maier argues, pre-modern Malay literature was often dismissed by Europeans for precisely the reasons it appealed to Malays. Maier points to the "emphatic figurality" of *hikayat*, the repetition and playful use of traditional themes which, in an oral culture, would have served to protect and enrich a sense of social identity.

This is why rhetoric - the use of literary devices in a way that warrants a superior command of the art of relevance - played such a dominant role in Malay culture: an oration was enjoyed, a recitation accepted, only if it effectively played upon the store of formulas and themes which tradition had to offer.<sup>69</sup>

Minangkabau letters can be read in these terms. The items listed were by no means the confused jumble which Europeans imagined. In their own way the *kebesaran* reflect fragments of Malay communal traditions. Many of the items listed occur in Malay stories, in tales which circulated throughout the archipelago, and were part of the knowledge with which Malays lived. As Maier points out, in the course of his consideration of *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, elements which figure in that text, such as Bukit Seguntang and Pulau Langkapuri, are mentioned in numerous Malay works which also situate Malay rulers vis a vis those of China and Rum and assert

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<sup>68</sup> The "emas kudarat Allah rupanya serperti rupa manusia", is mentioned in the following manuscripts Dulaurier, Or. 2241, ML. 483, Tambo Asa and in Marsden.

<sup>69</sup> Hendrik M. J. Maier, *In the Centre of Authority*, Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1988, p. 85.

their descent from Iskandar Dzulkarnain.<sup>70</sup> Similarly an item of Minangkabau *kebesaran*, like the magical horse Kuda Semborani, mentioned in letters from the eighteenth century, was not just a Minangkabau symbol but one which appears in numerous Malay stories and clearly had wide appeal.<sup>71</sup> A magical grove of bamboo, the Buluh Perindu, mentioned among the *kebesaran* in most *surat cap* from the seventeenth century onwards, also occurs elsewhere in Malay literature, notably in the *Sejarah Melayu* where it was situated on Gunung Ledang, home of the fairy princess.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, while the consistency and insistence with which the *kebesaran* were named in Minangkabau letters was exceptional, many of the items themselves were not. They were signs of power which would have been recognized across Malay communities because of their magical associations in a range of narrative contexts. To search for origins and derivations in this intertexture of motifs is not necessarily a profitable exercise. At the same time themes and motifs were not selected entirely at random. Messages were encoded in the selection and arrangement of rhetorical figures

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<sup>70</sup> Local knowledge of Iskandar's exploits spread through the archipelago by way of the *Iskandar Nama* and its Malay version, the *Hikayat Iskandar Dzulkarnain*. A body of Islamic knowledge about the shape and origins of the universe was disseminated through seventeenth century works like the *Bustanu'l Salatin*.

<sup>71</sup> See for instance, van Hasselt MS.; Cod. Or. 4818; ML. 483, l. 62; Dulaurier MS.; Sungai Paguh MS. The literary figure of the horse Semborani is believed to have had a Persian origin. For references to Kuda Semborani in Malay works see C. Hooykaas, *Over Maleise Literatuur*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1947, p. 209; *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* edition by Hill, p. 196 n. 137 and edition by Jones, p. 44; *Hikayat Indraputra* S.W.R. Mulyadi (ed.), Holland/USA: Foris Publications, 1983, pp. 144-6; *Sejarah Melayu (Diusahkan by W.G. Shellabear)*, Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1975, p. 14; M.C. Ricklefs, *Jogjakarta under Sultan Mangkubumi 1747-1792*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 387.

<sup>72</sup> See, for instance, Jambi 1691 VOC 1485, f. 77. and SWK 1725 VOC 2013, f. 110-11; Cod. Or. 4818; van Hasselt MS. ll. 20-1; Cod. Or., 5825, ll. 14-5. For the *Sejarah Melayu* see Brown (ed.) *Malay Annals*, p. 95 [ff.129-30]; Winstedt (ed.) *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 130. In Minangkabau letters this part of the *kebesaran* usually reads "this is the Sultan who has in his keeping the grove of bamboo which is the place of the bird *liar mati* and which came into existence on its own by God's grace". "Burung liar mati" is often taken to mean "the place where birds go to die", but according to Wilkinson "Liar mati" is a west Sumatran name for a particular bird, *Malay-English Dictionary*, p. 689.

and this is evident in lists of Minangkabau *kebesaran*.

### Local knowledge and Malay Heritage

Minangkabau kings made claim to leadership over other rulers by right of their descent from Iskandar and the sacred *kebesaran* they possessed. Insofar as other Malay/Sumatran kingdoms claimed descent from the Pagaruyung dynasty, and derived their traditions and regalia from that source, the Minangkabau *kebesaran* can be read as an assertion of the sacred origins of the Minangkabau royal house, and a link with the earliest sources of Malay identity.<sup>73</sup> The lists of *kebesaran* would have provided a shorthand reference for Malays to one strand of their communal traditions, a strand which was associated with Minangkabau sovereignty.

To appreciate this point it will be helpful to compare Minangkabau royal language with the story of Malay origins found in the famous Melaka chronicle, *Sejarah Melayu*. Three related points will be made. Firstly that there is a Minangkabau tradition probably as old as that of Melaka, linking Minangkabau with Bukit Seguntang. Secondly that there are historical grounds for this connection and thirdly that the link appears to have mattered to the Minangkabau rulers and their people and it contributed to the articulation of Minangkabau sovereignty.

#### i) Minangkabau *kebesaran* and Bukit Seguntang

The earliest known text of the *Sejarah Melayu* is contained in a nineteenth century manuscript known as Raffles 18 and the text transcribed therein is dated 1612

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<sup>73</sup> When Maier illustrates the range of Malay works in which stories about descent from Iskandar involve the brother rulers of Rum and China it is noticeable that many of the examples he cites are from Minangkabau or its peripheral courts. Maier, *In the Centre of Authority*, pp. 92-3.

A.D..<sup>74</sup> In *The Fall of Srivijaya in Malay History* O. W. Wolters has shown how this text incorporated the traditions of the Srivijayan kingdom into Melakan history and how the narrative functions to link Melaka's ruling dynasty to the sacred site of Malay kingship on Bukit Seguntang near Palembang. As Wolters also demonstrates, the same textual devices also serve to obscure a different strand in Malay history, namely a period of Minangkabau-Malayu prosperity and hegemony which came between the "fall" of Srivijaya and the "rise" of Melaka.<sup>75</sup>

In the Raffles 18 text of *Sejarah Melayu* the ruling dynasty of Palembang-Melaka is traced back to the magical appearance on Bukit Seguntang of three handsome youths who announced their descent from Iskandar Zulkarnain.<sup>76</sup> The parallel here with the Minangkabau account of three brother rulers descended from Iskandar Zulkarnain and ruling the world as kings of Minangkabau, China and Rum is obvious. In Raffles 18 all three youths wore crowns which were the sign (*alamat*) or proof of their descent.<sup>77</sup> The eldest brother was made ruler of Minangkabau by the inhabitants of Andelas and given the title Sang Sapurba. The second brother became ruler of Tanjung Pura and the third became ruler of Palembang, acquiring the Sanskrit title, Sri Tri Buana (Lord of the three worlds). This was the founder of the Palembang-Melaka dynasty.<sup>78</sup>

No more is said in the text about the eldest brother, Sang Sapurba, and

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<sup>74</sup> Romanized by R.O. Winstedt in *Sejarah Melayu: The Malay Annals, Raffles MS. no. 18, JMBRAS*, vol. 16, (1938). The same text has been translated into English by C.C. Brown *Sejarah Melayu; or, Malay Annals* [Raffles Ms. no. 18], Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976.

<sup>75</sup> Wolters, *The Fall of Srivijaya*, passim.

<sup>76</sup> Winstedt, "Sejarah Melayu", Chapter Three.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., pp. 56-7. The ruler of Tanjung Berah is listed among the raja who were descended from Pagaruyung in at one Minangkabau *surat-cap*. See Cod. Or. 5825 mentioned in Chapter Seven.

Minangkabau is not mentioned again in the text until much later when tension between Pagaruyung and Melaka is indicated. This treatment of the eldest brother and his story points to the sensitivity of Melaka-Minangkabau relations.<sup>79</sup> Raffles 18 has been celebrated by a British tradition of Malay scholarship. The early date of the text, Winstedt's edition, the link with Melaka-Johor and the coherence of the narrative to European minds have all contributed to giving this text a special dignity in Malay studies. But there are other versions of the *Sejarah Melayu* chronicle which are less celebrated, but which take up the Minangkabau story.

In a recension known as the Shellabear text the three princes also appear on Bukit Seguntang, but Sang Sapurba is clearly pre-eminent.<sup>80</sup> He is depicted as fathering Sang Nila Utama, who became Sri Tri Buana and founded Singapore, before travelling inland to become ruler of Minangkabau.<sup>81</sup> Thus, instead of being brothers, Sang Sapurba and Sri Tri Buana were father and son respectively. The same elements appear in both versions, but the emphasis is different with the Minangkabau founder presented as senior in the Shellabear text.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> See Wolters, *The Fall*, pp. 94-5.

<sup>80</sup> The Shellabear text is relatively late and Roolvink regarded it as a hybrid text, blending two versions of *Sejarah Melayu*, a short and long version which are each represented in other manuscripts. R. Roolvink, "The Variant Versions of the Malay Annals", in *Sejarah Melayu; or, Malay Annals* [Raffles Ms. no. 18], C. C. Brown (trans.), Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976, pp. xv-xxv.

<sup>81</sup> *Sejarah Melayu (Diusahkan by W.G. Shellabear)*, Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1975, pp. 16-26.

<sup>82</sup> Some comparison of this story in various versions of the *Sejarah Melayu* has been made by R. O. Winstedt in "The Founder of Malay Royalty and his Conquests of Saktimuna, the Serpent", *JMBRAS*, vol. 4, 3 (1926), pp. 413-9. See also L. C. Westenenck, "Boekit Segoentang en Goenoeng Mahameroe uit de Sedjarah Melajoe", *TBG*, vol. 63 (1923), pp. 210-26; and C. Hooykaas, *Over Maleise Literatuur*, Appendix One. A similar account of the Sang Sapurba's role is found in the text of *Sejarah Melayu* translated by John Leyden, *Sejarah Melayu: The Malay Annals: Translated from the Malay Language by the Late Dr John Leyden with an Introduction by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles F.R.S.*, London: Longman, Hurst Rees, Orme and Brown, 1821, pp. 22-39. I am grateful to V. and M.B. Hooker showing me their copy of this text.

The *kebesaran* listed in Minangkabau letters offer a reference, or intertext, against which the Shellabear origin story can be read. In Shellabear the signs of descent from Iskandar Dzulkarnain, carried by the three princes, are items which figure prominently among the Minangkabau *kebesaran*. As the brothers announce

Our sword is called Curek Mandang Kiri and our spear [*lembing*] is called Lembuara. This is a wooden seal called Kempa and when a letter is given to rulers this seal is used.<sup>83</sup>

The sword, Curek Simandang Giri, and the spear, Lembing Lembura, are key *kebesaran* which are mentioned in Minangkabau letters from the seventeenth and eighteenth as well as the nineteenth centuries.<sup>84</sup> The wooden seal called Kempa is a variant of the Kayu Kamat, mentioned in almost all *surat cap* and the earlier letters to the Dutch.<sup>85</sup>

Moreover, the Shellabear text recounts a further legend about the sword, Simandang Giri. It is said that when Sang Sapurba passed inland by way of Kuantan the inhabitants told him of a giant serpent, known as Saktimuna, which was destroying their rice fields. They informed Sang Sapurba that, if he wished to bestow bounty and alms upon them, then he should destroy the beast. They had resolved that, if he was successful, they would make him their lord. Sang Sapurba slew the monster with the help of Curek Simandang Giri, which received 190 notches in the struggle,

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<sup>83</sup> *Sejarah Melayu*, edited by W.G.Shellabear, Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1975, p. 18. ("...dan pedang kami ini Corek Mandang Kini namanya, dan lembing kami ini Lembuara namanya, yang satu ini cap kayu Kempa namanya, dan apabila memberi surat pada raja-raja cap inilah dicapkan.")

<sup>84</sup> For references to the Curek Simandang Giri and Lembing Lembura see Jambi 1691 VOC 1485, f. 77.; SWK 1725 VOC 2013, f. 110; SWK 1736...; also *Sejarah Raja-Raja Barus*, p. 3; ML 483, l. 52 and l. 56; van Hasselt MS. l. 16; Dulaurier MS. and Marsden letter etc.

<sup>85</sup> On the various names by which this wooden object is known in Malay work see Wilkinson, *Malay-English Dictionary*, pages 501, 503 and 552. In Minangkabau letters and texts the Kayu Kamat is said to have been divided into three between the rulers of Rum, China and Minangkabau. A *kebesaran* with this name entered the Perak regalia as a seal known as Cap Halintar Kayu Kamat, B. Andaya, "Nature of the State..."



and he became ruler of Minangkabau.<sup>86</sup> This, in essence, is the description of Simandang Giri given in most *surat cap* which state that the sword was damaged in this manner in the struggle with Saktimuna (or Sikatimuno).<sup>87</sup>

Another item in the Minangkabau *kebesaran* also highlights the complementarity of Minangkabau and Melaka traditions handed down in the Raffles 18 text of *Sejarah Melayu*. Both this text and the Shellabear version emphasize the importance of the crowns with which the three princes descended to Bukit Seguntang and which was the sign (*tanda*) of the princes' descent from Iskandar.<sup>88</sup> Similarly the royal crown is the first item of *kebesaran* to be mentioned in all Minangkabau letters. As early as 1511-12, Albuquerque reveals, the Minangkabau venerated a golden crown said to be derived from Alexander the Great.<sup>89</sup> Both Minangkabau and Melaka, therefore, put considerable store on the crown of Kingship as a sign of special descent from Iskandar.

In *Sejarah Melayu* (Raffles 18) the crown of kingship was lost overboard during

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<sup>86</sup> *Sejarah Melayu* (Shellabear), p. 26. Winstedt suggested that this legend may have been a reflection of the ruler's role as an incarnation of Indra who, in the *Rig Veda*, killed a serpent in order to release water for the fields. R.O. Winstedt, "The Founder of Malay Royalty and his Conquests of Saktimuna, the Serpent", *JMBRAS*, vol. 4, 3 (1926), pp. 413-9; and "Indra and Saktimuna", *JMBRAS*, vol. 23, 1 (1950), pp. 151-2. Since Adityawarman was praised in inscriptions as belonging to the race of Indra it is by no means implausible that the story entered Malay tradition via early legends about Indra. H. Kern reads the eleventh to fourteenth lines of Adityavarman's Kubu Raja inscription as roughly "Adityawarman, king out of the race of Indra, manifest incarnation of Lokeśvara", "Het Sanskrit-inschrift op den grafsteen van vorst Adityawarman te Kubur Raja (Menangkabau: +- 1300 Caka)", *BKI*, vol. 67, p. 221. According to Wilkinson the name "Seperba" is that of a nymph in Indra's heaven, *Malay-English Dictionary*, p. 1076. The practice of identifying the ruler with Indra in royal consecrations was a very ancient one, A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, London: Fontana, 1975, p. 82.

<sup>87</sup> See both the Dulaurier/Newbold/Korn text and ML. 483 in Appendix Four.

<sup>88</sup> In Raffles 18 each prince wore a crown. In Shellabear they brought one crown. Winstedt, "Sejarah Melayu", p. 55 and Shellabear *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 18.

<sup>89</sup> See Chapter Two above.

a storm.<sup>90</sup> But Minangkabau legends tell of a crown, Sa'ngghani, which fell overboard but was copied under the direction of Ceti Bilang Pande and came into the possession of Maharaja Diraja.<sup>91</sup> Several Minangkabau letters mention a crown of this name.<sup>92</sup> In terms of the complementarity of these early versions of Malay origins, therefore, what Melaka lost Minangkabau contrived to recover.<sup>93</sup> The crown which Minangkabau kings mentioned in their letters, then, was a sign which was narrated in some of the earliest known Malay legends and whose existence was energetically and creatively asserted in Minangkabau tradition.

These parallels help to situate the Minangkabau *kebesaran* in Malay tradition. Items to which Minangkabau rulers laid claim from the seventeenth century onwards were not just randomly chosen; they belonged to a narrative tradition which linked the Minangkabau dynasty to the origins of Malay kingship on the mount of "Si Guntang Mahameru" which the rulers also mentioned in the seventeenth century.<sup>94</sup> One of the things the *surat cap* genre shows us is that Minangkabau claims to this distinguished descent were scarcely less venerable and just as consistent as those of the Raffles 18 *Sejarah Melayu*. A Minangkabau-Malayu version of Malay origins was current in the seventeenth century, and probably much earlier, and Minangkabau rulers signalled this by including some of its motifs in their claims to greatness.

What did this heritage mean and what was the status of the Minangkabau

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<sup>90</sup> Winstedt, "Sejarah Melayu", p. 61.

<sup>91</sup> See Netscher, "Verzameling", pp. 42-3.

<sup>92</sup> See Or. 5825; Tambo Asa; and the *Asal Usul Bengkulu*. Most nineteenth century letters describe the crown as "mahkota nabi Sulaiman".

<sup>93</sup> Another Minangkabau tradition relates that the crown was retrieved from the sea of Kalzum using an anchor called Paduka Jati. This anchor and the story associated with it is mentioned among *kebesaran* in letters from the early eighteenth century. SWK 1725 VOC 2013, f. 110 and SWK 1736...

<sup>94</sup> See, for instance, *Dagh-Register*, vol. 27, 32.

dynasty's claims to be the first and greatest rulers in their sphere?

ii) Minangkabau and Melayu

Wolters has shown how the Bukit Seguntang legend in Raffles 18 served to link Melaka's founders with an older Srivijayan heritage, symbolised in the text by Bukit Seguntang. He also suggests that the career of Sri Tri Buana, in that text, was a device used to "repudiate" the period of Minangkabau-Malayu prominence in Sumatran history.<sup>95</sup> As we saw in Chapter two, the Melayu kingdom, which Adityawarman transferred inland to Minangkabau, also had real claims to assuming the "mantle" of overlordship worn by Srivijaya and the old name of Suvarnabhūmi. One of the ways by which the Melakan "repudiation" of this heritage was achieved in the text, according to Wolters was Sri Tri Buana's consecration as ruler in a ceremony of lustration and enthronement. The ceremonial described in the text, Wolters shows, casts Sri Tri Buana as the Boddhisatva Avalokeśvara or Lord of the World.<sup>96</sup>

It is significant, therefore, that both the name Seri Tri Buana and a precedent for this Boddhisatva characterisation can be found in Melayu-Minangkabau history. There is a striking similarity between the names mentioned in the inscription which the Melayu king received from Java in 1286 and the *Ciri*, or coronation formula, recited in the Raffles 18 text of *Sejarah Melayu*. In that text a king named Sri Maharaja is recognised as "ruler over the whole Suvarna-bhūmi" and he is given the name Sri Tri Buana (Lord of the Three Worlds).<sup>97</sup> Similarly, in the 1286 inscription the ruler of Suvarnabhūmi is also known as Sri Maharaja and he has an almost

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<sup>95</sup> Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, pages 91, 125 and 170.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-135.

<sup>97</sup> *Sejarah Melayu; or, Malay Annals* [Raffles MS. no. 18], C. C. Brown (trans.), Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 15. See also Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, p. 107.

identical name, Srimat Tribhuwarnarāja Mauliwarmmadewa.<sup>98</sup>

Moreover, as Wolters points out, an historical precedent for the Seri Tri Buana's consecration as a Bodhisattva figure can be found in Adityawarman's reconsecration of this Amoghapāśa-lokeśvara image in 1347.<sup>99</sup> Wolters suggests that the Sri Tri Buana figure in *Sejarah Melayu* was a "shadow" of the historical career of Melaka's founder, Parameswara (or Iskandar Syah as he became), which spanned the years 1389-90 to 1413-14.<sup>100</sup> Adityawarman's last known inscription dates from 1375 and the possibility exists that the figuration of Sri Tri Buana as an Avalokesvara was a response to Adityawarman's own ceremony.<sup>101</sup> In other words the characteristics assumed by the overlord of Malayu in the late fourteenth century were adopted in the Melaka genealogy and transferred to the fictional Melakan ancestor, Sri Tri Buana whose persona in the Melaka text was a substitute for the early fifteenth century

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<sup>98</sup> Krom, *Hindoe-Javaansche Geschiedenis*, pp. 335-6; Coedès, *Indianized States*, p. 201; also Satyawati Suleiman, *The Archaeology and History of West Sumatra*, Jakarta: Bulletin of the Research Centre of Archaeology of Indonesia No. 12, 1977, p. 3. J.G. de Casparis, has observed that this title reminds us of that used in the *Sejarah Melayu* in "Srivijaya (Sriwijaya) and Malayu", Unpublished paper prepared for a SPAFA Consultative Workshop on Archaeological and Environmental Studies of Srivijaya, September 17-20, 1985, p. 7

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., pp. 132-3. For a description and a reading of this inscription see H. Kern, "De Wij-inscriptie op het Amoghapaca-beeld van Padang Candi (midden-Sumatra) 1269 caka", *Verspreide Geschriften*, vol. 7, pp. 165-75. A photograph of the statue is contained in F.M. Schnitger, *Forgotten Kingdoms in Sumatra*, Plate iv. This image represented the spiritual essence, or Dhyānibuddha Amoghasiddhi, in demonic form, which is manifested on earth as the Bodhisattva Avalokesvara, Christian Humphries, *Buddhism*, p. 55 and de Casparis, "Srivijaya and Malayu", p. 2. In the Mahayana tradition Avalokesvara "represented an inexhaustible repository of protection and liberality, the two main attributes of sovereignty, terrestrial and heavenly", S. J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 39. The demonic aspect of this image is related to tantric rites performed as means of achieving emptiness.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp. 121-3. According to Pires, Parameswara changed his name to "Mjcura which means 'Exempt'" before leaving Palembang. Cortesao, *Suma Oriental*, vol. II, p. 231. Wolters equates this with an *abhiseka* ceremony, intended to consecrate the prince as a divine incarnation. *Fall of Srivijaya*, p. 124.

<sup>101</sup> As Wolters argues, Parameswara/Iskandar Syah may also have imitated Adityawarman's consecration with his own change of name. *Fall of Srivijaya*, p. 133 and n. 98 above.

career of Melaka's founder, Parmeswara/Iskandar Syah.<sup>102</sup>

There are various hints that this was the case, as Wolters' argument reveals.<sup>103</sup> Wolters points to the parallel between Sri Tri Buana's relationship with the indigenous Demang Lebar Daun in Raffles 18 and the Patih mentioned in Adityawarman's inscriptions, who is thought to have been a representative of the local population.<sup>104</sup> The importance of gold in the Bukit Seguntang episode of *Sejarah Melayu*, where the three brothers appear after turning the rice fields into gold, also suggests a possible Minangkabau link, since Adityawarman termed himself *kanakamedinindra* "sovereign of the gold-bearing ground".<sup>105</sup> The possibility also arises that, if Sri Tri Buana was a "shadow" of the historical Parmeswara/Iskandar Syah, then Sang Sapurba might have been a "shadow", or textual device, invented to parallel the career of Adityawarman who, like Sang Sapurba, travelled inland to become ruler over Minangkabau.

These links between the Melaka genealogy and Minangkabau-Malayu - the name Tribhuwana, the Avalokesvara figuration, the hill of gold, and the appearance of three princes in both traditions - suggest the connections between Minangkabau-Malayu and Palembang-Melaka traditions. They also point to the significance of Minangkabau heritage in the collective memory from which the strands of Malay identity were woven. The Melayu period may have been important in shaping this

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<sup>102</sup> It is noteworthy that the Amoghapasa image was first consecrated by the Melayu king whose name was Tribhuwanaraja, who received it from Kertanagara in 1286 A.D., before being rededicated by Adityawarman in 1347 A.D.. See Kern, "De Wij-inscriptie, and de Casparis "Srivijaya and Malayu", p. 6.

<sup>103</sup> Many of the points about Melayu history discussed here are implicit in Wolters' argument, although Minangkabau-Malayu history was not his main concern.

<sup>104</sup> Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, p.132 and H. Kern, "De Wij-inscriptie", pp. 169.

<sup>105</sup> Kern, "Het Sanskrit-inschrift", p. 219.

identity and the "repudiation" in Raffles 18 serves to emphasise this point.

To what extent did Minangkabau discourse, in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, draw on this Melayu heritage? Such questions can not be easily answered, but a brief comparison between Minangkabau royal letters and some of Adityawarman's inscriptions suggest that there were parallels.

### iii) Minangkabau Royal Language and Adityawarman's Inscriptions

Among the Minangkabau *kebesaran* listed in *surat cap* is an item known as "*pohon naga turun*" or "*puan naga tarun*".<sup>106</sup> Most nineteenth century Malay letters refer to this as a *pohon* (tree), but in seventeenth and eighteenth century letters translated by the Dutch the item is described variously as a tree and as a betel container (*puan*) called *Nagatarun*, a name which Wilkinson translates as the "calling dragons".<sup>107</sup> The alternative reading, of course, is a tree down which a *naga* descends.<sup>108</sup> It would be difficult to say which of these is the "correct" reading, and it may well be that the betel container *puan nagatarun* was derived from the *pohon naga tarun/turun*, since the latter is a potent image in Buddhist and Hindu mythology.<sup>109</sup> F.D.K. Bosch suggests that the *pohon naga taro* can be equated with the "wish tree" of Indian myth, the *Kalpataru* or *Kalpadruma*.<sup>110</sup> It is significant, therefore, that a

<sup>106</sup> See, for instance, Dulaurier, ML. 483, Sungai Paguh MS., Asal-usul Bengkulu, ML. 5283 etc.

<sup>107</sup> Compare Jambi 1691 VOC 1485, f. 77v. which mentions "the puan or betel container called Nagatarom", with SWK 1725 VOC 2013, f. 110, which mentions "the tree Poenaga Taroen". see also R.J. Wilkinson, *Malay-English Dictionary*, p. 1174.

<sup>108</sup> A tree called Naga Tarun has also entered several Minangkabau traditions, see Datuk Sangguno Diraja, *Curaian Adat Alam Minangkabau*, Bukit Tinggi: Balai Pustaka, 1987, p. 37 and Netscher, "Verzameling van Overlevering", p. 48.

<sup>109</sup> See, for instance, Richard Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree: A Study of Indian Culture and Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, pages 40 and 188.

<sup>110</sup> F.D.K. Bosch, "De Rijkssieraden van Pagar Roejoeng", OV, 1930, pp. 204. Or "tree of plenty" Gonda, *Sanskrit in Indonesia*, p. 118.

"wish tree", *Kalpataru*, is mentioned in one of Adityawarman's inscriptions as an analogue of the ruler's liberality.<sup>111</sup> This may be the original source of both readings of the name which occurs in Minangkabau *kebesaran*. Possibly the betel container, *puan nagataru*, which also appears in the Perak regalia, was a means of giving contemporary material substance to an ancient name.<sup>112</sup>

The language of the inscriptions themselves can also be compared with the later, Islamic, *surat cap* and similar themes appear in the two genres.<sup>113</sup> Like his successors, Adityawarman emphasized his position as ruler over the golden earth of central Sumatra. He is described as a descendant of Indra and an incarnation of *Lokeswara*, the loving or affectionate God. Later Minangkabau rulers also described themselves as emanations of God and divine representatives on earth.

The similarity between the figuration of Southeast Asian rulers as Bodhisattvas prior to Islam and as Khalifat Allah in the early centuries of Islamic conversion has been noted. It was only later, in the second half of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, that tension developed between Islamic political theory and Southeast Asia's semi-divine rulers.<sup>114</sup> Minangkabau is a particular example of the Islamic ruler figured as a divine manifestation and we have seen that the king's role as God's chosen ruler on earth is emphasised continuously in letters from the seventeenth century.

The intimate relationship with God which Minangkabau kings claimed in their

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<sup>111</sup> H.Kern, "Het Sanskrit-Inschrift", pp. 220-1.

<sup>112</sup> B. Andaya, "The Nature of the State", p. 25, n.21.

<sup>113</sup> At this stage the inscriptions are only accessible through nineteenth readings. Professor J. G. de Casparis is currently engaged in research on Adityawarman's fourteenth century inscriptions.

<sup>114</sup> This point is discussed in detail by A.C.Milner in "Islam and Malay Kingship", *JRAS*, no. 1 (1981), especially p.54 and pp.56-7. On religious change in Minangkabau in the eighteenth century see Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, Chapter Four.

letters is not at all unlike Adityawarman's role as a *Lokesvara*.<sup>115</sup> In the early eighteenth century Inderma Syah of Suruaso declared,

I am Sultan over the earth and the sea, possessed of a power and a force (*macht en kracht*) which comes from God. Verily I can make war and peace and I also exercise continual welfare. The mightiest Sultan in this world I am the seat of all kings and the crown of the whole world.<sup>116</sup>

There are clear echoes here of phrases from Adityawarman's inscriptions, which describe him as a "great lord of kings", "whose dominion is absolute".<sup>117</sup> Who has the "welfare of Melayupura continually in mind", who is "benevolent", who stretches his crown over the most powerful kings" and is "overlord of the righteous".<sup>118</sup>

Royal bounty is especially important in both the letters and in Adityawarman's inscriptions and similar benefits were said to flow to loyal subjects in both cases. The Kubu Raja inscription mentions the ruler's "good deeds" and praises him for sharing the "fruits of virtuous service".<sup>119</sup> As mentioned, his liberality in bestowing alms on the poor is compared with a *Kalpataru*. We have already seen that royal abundance and liberality is a central theme in Minangkabau *surat cap* from the seventeenth century onwards. The *surat cap* also refer to the ruler's knowledge and to his constancy, while in the inscriptions Adityawarman is praised for his unwavering

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<sup>115</sup> See, for instance, Kern, "Het Sanskrit-inschrift", p.221. As we have seen, Minangkabau *surat cap* emphasise *syufaat* or intercession as part of the ruler's role.

<sup>116</sup> SWK 1725 VOC 2013, f. 109.

<sup>117</sup> Kern, "Nog iets over 't opschrift", p. 273.

<sup>118</sup> De Casparis, "Malayu and Srivijaya", p. 2; Ibid., pages 271 and 274. According to Kern's reading and translation the Amoghapaca image from Rambahan in central Sumatra is inscribed with the statement, "Illustrious majesty Udayadityawarman. prodigious in his power, an Indra among kings, adorned with the crown and protected by the heavens, overlord among kings. His commands are recognised everywhere. H. Kern, "De Wij-inscriptie", p. 172.

<sup>119</sup> Kern, "Het Sanskrit-inschrift", p. 220.



constancy in religious devotion.<sup>120</sup>

Some of the language of Adityawarman's inscriptions has been shown to refer to precise esoteric practices associated with the Kalacakra sect of Mahayana Buddhism, nevertheless there are similarities in the imagery employed in both types of royal message.<sup>121</sup> Even references to Adityawarman's demonic sacrifices recall the language of *surat cap*: the scent of Adityawarman's offerings is compared to the fragrance of ten million flowers spreading all around, just as the breezes from Paradise, mentioned in *surat cap*, are characterised by their fragrant scent.<sup>122</sup> Like the later Malay letters, Adityawarman's inscriptions also refer to the ruler's commands to his subjects, the ruler's lustre and to his precious jewels.<sup>123</sup>

Other parallels could be drawn between *surat cap* and the fourteenth century inscriptions of central Sumatra. Enough has been said, however, to point to the possibility that echoes of royal language from the fourteenth century can be heard in the later genre. The advantages promised by kingship were not dissimilar whether the rulers were Buddhist or Muslim. The promise of access to divine bounty and the ruler's intercession on behalf of his subjects was a crucial factor in each case. Professor de Casparis has recently suggested that the continuities between the kingdoms of

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid. In the Dulaurier text the ruler is described as "wise and constant to God's servants" (ialah sultan yang amat budiman lagi setiawan pada segala hamba Allah). See also Or. 2241 l. 8 and Ml. 483 l. 37 for the same phrase.

<sup>121</sup> Moens, "Het Buddhisme op Java en Sumatra", pp. 521-577.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 575 and H. Kern, "Het zoogenaamde rotinschrift van "Batu Beragung" in Menangkabau (1269 en 1297 Caka)", *TBG*, vol. VI (1917), p. 262.

<sup>123</sup> The ruler's lustre, or glow, is mentioned in the Bukit Gombak inscription, H. Kern, "Nog iets over 't opschrift van Pagarruyung in Menangkabau (1278 Caka)", *BKI*, VIII (1873), p. 273. The Malay letters frequently use the term *cahaya* in reference to the ruler. Like the later Minangkabau kings, Adityawarman issued commands to be heard by all, see references to the Amoghopaca image found at Padang Candi, in H. Kern "De Wij-inscriptie op het Amoghapaca-beeld van Padang Candi (Midden-Sumatra), 1269 Caka", in H. Kern *Verspreide Geschriften*, 's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1917, vol. 7, p. 172; and in Nilakanta Sastri, *History of Srivijaya*, p. 137.

Melayu-Jambi in the eleventh century, Srivijaya, and Melayu-Minangkabau in the fourteenth century may be greater than scholars have previously thought.<sup>124</sup> Perhaps the continuities between the fourteenth century period of Minangkabau history and the later Minangkabau dynasty may also have been under-estimated.

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This discussion of Minangkabau *kebesaran* has led in various directions. It would be possible to probe the significance of individual items in more detail. Yet it has been made sufficiently clear why these signs of power were set out at such length in Minangkabau letters. They were themselves a language of authority, situating the ruler in relation to the Alam and linking him with God's grace and with God's own many wonderful signs, signs which are frequently mentioned in the Koran.<sup>125</sup> The ruler's custody of God's miraculous signs affirmed his role as intermediary between man and God and as earthly representative of divine power.

The letters and *kebesaran* also situated Minangkabau kings within a system of Malay cultural knowledge. The custodian of Sang Sapurba's sword was intimately linked with the very source of Malay cultural identity. As Sumatran kings, seated among the gold-bearing mountains, and surrounded by the ancient signs of Adityawarman's kingdom, Minangkabau rulers were inheritors of the sacred mountain of Bukit Seguntang Mahameru and the golden earth of Suvarnabūmi. The Melaka chronicle, *Sejarah Melayu*, shows how that dynasty was forced to adapt to new

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<sup>124</sup> De Casparis, "Srivijaya and Malayu", p.8.

<sup>125</sup> The language of the Koran makes frequent reference to "signs" of God grace and power and discusses the need for signs. See, for example, s. ii, v. 164 and s. iii, v. 108 and v. 190. The Arabic tem *ayat* (sign, token, mark) also encompasses the idea of "miracle, wonder or model" and can apply to the revelations in the Koran and the divine word in general. See *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, edited by J. M. Cowan, p. 36.

circumstances in a new location, to disguise an inglorious period of the past and to respond flexibly to the demands of entrepot trade. The consistency and continuity of Minangkabau rhetoric suggests that the need for adaptation was less felt in the interior of Sumatra and it was, perhaps, partly this lack of flexibility which led to the elimination of kingship in Minangkabau in the early nineteenth century. At the same time this consistency in the royal language of Minangkabau may have been part of its power.

The *kebesaran* signalled the status of Minangkabau kings by compacting many of the most potent traditions of the Minangkabau-Malay world into a list of names. Considered in the context of the idea of the "solidity of the sign" the impact of words and names associated with Bukit Seguntang and Iskandar Zulkarnain may have had a "real power" which is difficult for us to grasp. As Leach has suggested, the utterance of words themselves can be a ritual act. Language, moreover, can be equated in ritual and religious contexts with the essence of things.<sup>126</sup> It may be that the words inscribed in *surat cap* had this sort of impact.

The *surat cap* genre encapsulated Minangkabau royal authority. The benefits of kingship were articulated as well as the signs by which royal power was known. Royal letters located the kingdom within a geographic sphere and linked the Sumatran periphery to the sacred origins of the dynasty. This conclusion has implications for the way in which both space and time were regarded.

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<sup>126</sup> See the discussion in S.T. Tambiah, "The Magical Power of Words", *Man*, vol. 3 no. 2 (1968), pp. 182-3. Tambiah cites Leach on p. 175.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### A KINGDOM OF WORDS

This thesis set out to investigate the nature of Minangkabau royal authority and to re-examine the functionalist explanation of kingship as a sacred, but powerless, institution which symbolised Minangkabau unity and defined the sphere of the Alam. What has been uncovered is the **process** through which this "symbolic institution" acted as a source of higher power which could be transmitted to the Minangkabau Alam in one period of Sumatran history. Minangkabau kings disseminated that quality in signs which, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, empowered Minangkabau communities.

It has been emphasised that the king did not need to act, to hold executive control, in order to be powerful, although Minangkabau kings did act by broadcasting their letters to the coast. Moreover, this was not a situation in which the king's grand rhetoric "legitimized" a control he already exercised. Rather language, here, was itself part of the substance of the ruler's relationship with his realm. There was no place in the scattered and mobile communities of the Alam Minangkabau for an absolute ruler with the sort of centralising power which the Dutch hoped for when they first heard of the "Emperor" of Minangkabau. Europeans quickly noticed this and for them the ruler became a king of words, of "mere" language and titles. As Milner has shown, however, names, titles and royal ritual were a central part of the life of Malay kingdoms.<sup>1</sup>

Certain themes have emerged here which are particularly important for understanding how this "kingdom of words" worked. As Taufik Abdullah and others have remarked, the relationship between the inland core and the outer spheres of the

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<sup>1</sup> As Milner has shown, in response to the "real power" emphasis of functionalist analysis, the distribution of titles and custody of a subject's *nama* was part of a Malay ruler's kingly duties, *Kerajaan*, passim.

kingdom was particularly important. The centrality of the ruler in Indic configurations such as the *mandala* pattern is often noted. What is less studied is the way in which the inner and outer parts of the kingdom were related to each other. De Josselin de Jong's analysis of this relationship rested on the idea of the "symbolic" role of the king. What has been attempted here is to take that analysis further and, by emphasising language and communication, to look at the way in which the rulers disseminated their power to the periphery, not to dominate but to include their subjects in their sacred realm. Like their Boddhisatva predecessors these kings were intercessors who channelled God's blessings to *bani adam*, the world of men.

In seventeenth century Sumatra this was not just a "conventional attribute" of Southeast Asian kingship; it was, I have argued, part of the "real" world. An appreciation of the "authority of the sign" helps us to understand how this might be so. In the semiotic world of seventeenth century Sumatra, it seems, signs often had the value of "proofs". The Minangkabau ruler was, himself, a proof or a sign of God; the Arabic exordium used in *surat cap* emphasises this quality and the king is described as a "proof for mankind".

Just as the connection between God and king was a direct one, so the link between the ruler and his signs had a tangible quality. Commentators have noticed how letters could represent the ruler in Malay societies. Barbara Andaya cites a Malay text from Riau which states that "any *perahu* sent on a royal mission was entitled to display the royal flag, since the letter *stood in place of the ruler*."<sup>2</sup> The ideas developed here on the basis of Minangkabau evidence may help to elucidate this phenomenon. In the Riau text just cited, the Malay term for "stood in place of the ruler" is *serasa* - *surat serasa raja* or "the letter is like (or has a similar essence to) the raja".<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> B. Andaya, *Abode of Grace*, p. 100, n. 133. From RAS Raffles 32, Part D, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Wilkinson, *Jawi Malay-English Dictionary* (1902).

same term is used in a *surat-cap* from Rao which warns that to destroy the letter is the same (*serasa*) as destroying the Yang Dipertuan.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the Susuhunan of Mataram used a similar Malay term in his letter to Raja Sakti which, translated into Dutch, described Raja Sakti as "as if holy". The notion of likeness or identity between the ruler and his signs is reminiscent of the idea of the idea of similitude or resemblance used by Foucault to describe the one-ness of words and things. It underscores the intimate link between what has been referred to here as the "Authority of the Sign", but which might just as easily be called the "realness" of language in seventeenth century Sumatra.<sup>5</sup>

This conclusion has implications for the way in which *surat cap* were received by Sumatran communities. As suggested here the writing itself, the sacred script, was a powerful sign; but the actual words and formulae which Minangkabau kings repeated over centuries also contained meanings which had relevance for the inhabitants of the Alam Minangkabau.

Language helped to give meaning to the existence of the community through its "heritage". Earlier chapters considered the way in which European writers emphasised the "former glory" of the Minangkabau kingdom. It was suggested that this was, in part, a convention which European writers used to dismiss the current relevance of Minangkabau royal authority and explain its apparent lack of substance. We have seen, however, that Minangkabau kings and their royal envoys also emphasised the past greatness of the kingdom and described the kings's authority in terms of his

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<sup>4</sup> Rao MS, line 25-6, "Maka hendaklah dipeliharakan daulat ini serasa memeliharakan daulat Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung jikalau dibinasakan serasa membinasakan daulat Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung."

<sup>5</sup> Wolters has pointed to a similar idea expressed by Ian Mabbett in his important article "Devarāja". "That the symbols are equivalent to the things they represent 'is not itself a statement in the language; it is an initial convention that is necessary before any statement can be made'". O. W. Wolters, *History, Culture and Religion in Southeast Asian Perspectives*, Singapore: ISEAS, 1982, p 84.

illustrious origins. These local statements, however, do not suggest that the kings were not currently powerful and this may tell us something about the way in which the past was approached by the ruler and his subjects.

As descendants from the Bukit Seguntang, children of Iskandar Zulkarnain and representatives of God on earth the rulers of Minangkabau were custodians of the major source of power in the Malay world. The ruler himself, we have seen, was not only a human embodiment of that power; it was also represented in *kebesaran* and could be transmitted, through signs, to the Alam. We need not assume that this power was exhaustible or spent at some stage in the past. As Anderson has suggested of Java, power was conceived as a concrete entity which is constant in the universe whether or it is concentrated in one place or person, or is diffused.<sup>6</sup> The sources examined here suggest that in seventeenth and eighteenth century Sumatra too power was conceived as a divine and immanent quality which be focussed in individuals and signs.

As custodians of Malay heritage Minangkabau rulers were a source of access to this power. In this way descent from Pagaruyung did more than legitimate earthly governments on the Sumatran periphery; it actually linked them to a divine plane. We know little about the way in which this power worked before Europeans arrived in the archipelago, although Minangkabau authority appears to have had wide relevance in different parts of Sumatra in the sixteenth and probably also the fifteenth centuries. For the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, Dutch sources have enabled us to investigate the way in which Minangkabau royal power was accessed and realised in political action. Minangkabau royal discourse enabled leaders like Raja Sakti or the Raja Dua Celas to be figured as embodiments of divine power which linked them on a

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<sup>6</sup> B.R.O'G. Anderson, "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture", in Claire Holt (ed.) *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1972, pp. 1-69.

temporal continuum with Iskandar Zulkarnain and Bukit Seguntang.

The VOC servant J.J. Pits reflected Minangkabau preoccupations when he promised to restore the west coast to its state "in the days of Paduka Seri Iskandar Zulkarnain".<sup>7</sup> *Rantau* communities in Jambi, and elsewhere, appealed to Minangkabau kings for the restoration of a "Golden Age".<sup>8</sup> And Raja Sakti expressed the way in which Minangkabau kingship was linked on a temporal plane to the origins of the earth through the weaving *Sansita Kala*. This weaving *tanun*, usually referred to as a loom in *surat cap*, was the same age as the earth and it wove the years of men, striking once only each year. The end of the fabric, Raja Sakti said, would mark the end of the world.<sup>9</sup>

The challenges facing Malay communities in the late seventeenth century were dramatic. The coastal world was changing irretrievably. In this context Minangkabau kingship appears to have represented the world which was. This was not necessarily a past age as we would conceive it, but an age of connectedness in which the living heritage of the coastal communities was embodied in the *asal* of their rulers and their immediate links to Bukit Seguntang, the origin of the Alam.

If time rested in the ruler's keeping so too did space. The *rantau* world was a scattered one. The migrant Minangkabau and those who settled in the foothills were linked to inland core by lineage ties which were expressed in the two *laras*. As most other commentators have noticed there was a need for a wider conception of the community and this was something which kingship could offer. *Surat cap* reveal the importance of a spatial dimension in Minangkabau royal discourse. The rulers described the Alam to their subjects, it was illustrated in medallions and inscribed in

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter Five above.

<sup>8</sup> See Andaya "Cash-Cropping", p. 117.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter Eight, n. 24 above.



the lists of Sumatran place names where the ruler's words might flow. By so doing the king's words would have helped realise the Minangkabau world and to give meaning to the life of the community.

It is essential that the transmission of messages broadcast to the frontier in royal letters be imagined in the context of the rugged Sumatran terrain where hills and forests separate dispersed settlements and serve to isolate them from their neighbours. In an age before mass-communication and prior to the construction of roadways in colonial times, the royal word would have had a special impact. These authoritative words would have helped to those communities to understand their world and the sources of power within it.

Sumatra may differ from most other parts of the Malay archipelago in the way that communities organized and regulated themselves. Reference has already made to European perceptions of the notorious "ungovernability" of Sumatrans. The people, as seventeenth century Dutchmen observed, were "ruled by many chiefs" and often these had little power to control their communities.<sup>10</sup> In this context kingly authority had a different role to play than in more centralised and highly organized polities. This appears to be true of Aceh, after the seventeenth century and among the Bataks as well as in central Sumatra. The study of "Sumatran forms" of political behaviour is an avenue for future research. In Aceh the rulers distributed mandates or letters known as *sarakata* to their subjects and these were regarded as signs of authority. Similarly, the ruler's of Banten, Palembang and Jambi used *piagam* to communicate with their subjects and to authorise local chiefs.<sup>11</sup> These patterns have been little studied, but the importance of *surat cap* in Minangkabau suggests that Sumatra is a rich field for further study of these authoritative words.

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<sup>10</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. III, p. 727; and Chapter Three above.

<sup>11</sup> See Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehnese* and H. Djajadiningrat, *Sedjarah Banten*.

The thesis has attempted to come closer to an appreciation of the meanings of authority in the Minangkabau world in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. To do this it has been necessary to re-examine the European discourse on Minangkabau kingship and to re-read European statements in the light of their perceptions and expectations as well as in the light of the communicative world of seventeenth century Sumatrans. In so doing the study may contribute to the re-examination of "Orientalist" writing in Southeast Asia as well as to the understanding of Southeast Asian political forms.

**APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX ONE

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON DUTCH SOURCES FOR WEST SUMATRA

Within the fairly narrow scope of the first ten years of VOC contact with the west coast of Sumatra several important secondary works touch on the this subject and a brief bibliographical note may help to identify and clarify the status of the sources used in this chapter.

The primary documents which stand closest in relation to the events they describe are the letters and reports which were sent by VOC servants to the Governor General in Batavia. These are contained in the *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren* (Batavia's Incomend Brievenboek) of the VOC relating to Sumatra's Westkust, Sallida and Tico from the years 1661 to 1779. These letters form the major archival source consulted in this chapter. Next in line in terms of direct relevance is the *Dagh-Register, Gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts India*, published in 31 vols, which records daily happenings in Batavia and which frequently refers to letters received from the west coast and to embassies which arrived in Batavia. The contract book of the Dutch East India Company also contains direct evidence in the form of copies of contracts made with individual territories and rulers. These have been published in J.E. Heeres and F.W. Stapel (eds.), *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, vols.1-V, *BKI*, vol.57 (1907); vol.87 (1931); vol.91 (1934); vol.93 (1935); vol.96 (1938).

Summaries and restatements of some of the material contained in the *Overgekomen Brieven* (OB) are found in the edited and published edition of the *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII Der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, 7 vols, W. Ph. Coolhaas (ed.) 's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960-1985. The published *Generale Missiven* contains extracts from annual survey letters sent to the Heren XVII in Amsterdam by the Governor's General of the VOC. In relation to west Sumatra the *Generale Missiven* sometimes contain fragments of information which have been lost from the *Overgekomen Brieven* (Batavia's Inkomend Brievenboek), but on the whole they do not contain the precise and detailed account of events found in the *Overgekomen Brieven*.

Several Dutch authors have used the *Overgekomen Brieven* from Padang to write narrative accounts of the history of the VOC in west Sumatra. The earliest of these is by J.L. van Bazel who wrote a two part survey of West Sumatra in 1761. The first part, his *Radicaale Beschrijving*, concerns culture and history and exists only in manuscript form. A copy is held in the Arsip Nasional, Jakarta. The second part, on Dutch trade with the west coast, was published in *TNI*, 9, 2, (1847), pp. 1-95. In the late nineteenth century E.B. Kielstra's summarized Van Bazel's manuscript in E.B. Kielstra, "Onze Kennis van Sumatras Westkust, omstreeks de helft der Achttiende Eeuw", *BKI*, 36 (1887), pp. 508-9. A later survey of the course of VOC relations with west Sumatra was prepared by N. Macleod in his "De Oost-Indische Compagnie op Sumatra in de 17e eeuw", which was published in six parts in *Indische Gids*, vol.1 (1904), pp.620-638; vol.2 (1904), pp.795-805; vol.1 (1905), pp.470-468; vol.2 (1905), pp.127-142; vol.1 (1906), pp.777-808; vol.2 (1906), pp.1420-1449.

In addition to these summaries of the archival records, two Dutch studies from the first half of the twentieth century have used the *Overgekomen Brieven* from Sumatra's Westkust to analyze short periods of the VOC occupation of west Sumatra in considerable detail. The first of these is W.J.A De Leeuw whose work on the first Dutch treaty with the west coast, the Painan Contact (1662), involved a close study of

is a published doctoral thesis by Hendrik Kroeskamp entitled *De Westkust en Minangkabau (1665-1668)*, Utrecht: Fa. Scotanus & Jens, 1931.

Kroeskamp, in particular, is a familiar friend to historians of seventeenth century west Sumatra and, while the focus of his study is upon the three years between 1665 and 1668, his detailed reading of the OB between 1661 and 1670 gives his work considerable depth of insight into events during the first decade of Company contact with west Sumatra. In this chapter all points of substance are made with reference to the original documents in the OB and to the other primary Dutch sources. The present thesis is not intended as a dedicated study of the VOC in west Sumatra, however, and information relating to the general progress of VOC relations with the west coast has been based upon the secondary works mentioned above as well as primary documents. In the case of Kroeskamp, in particular, there is an area of overlap in the subject matter of his thesis and the events dealt with here. Inescapably, since both studies are concerned with relations between the Minangkabau royal family and the VOC, some of the information in Kroeskamp's study is restated here and some of the same documents are referred to. An effort has been made in what follows to avoid undue repetition and Kroeskamp's analytical judgments are handled critically in the same way as those of any other secondary work. It is only in cases of general information that Kroeskamp has been used as a substantial source.

Three modern studies have covered this period of west Sumatran history. Kathirithamby-Wells' article on west Sumatra before the Painan Treaty deals with the period immediately before intensive VOC relations with the west coast population and has been used to establish general points about that period. Both Christine Dobbin's *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy - Central Sumatra, 1784 -1847*, Copenhagen: Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, 1983, and a recent thesis by P.D. Rueb, *Het WestSumatraanse Goud. Handel en Exploitatie in de Zeventiende Eeuw*, Doctoraalscriptie geschiedenis, Rijksuniversiteit, Leiden 1989, examine the period of VOC trade in west Sumatra.

## APPENDIX TWO

## Communications with the Minangkabau Court before 1668

Early in 1668 Pits became sufficiently concerned about the silence inland to send the Padang *panghulu*, Raja di Hilir, to investigate. Raja di Hilir returned on the 26th January with the news that all was peaceful at the capital of the king and the *Bendahara*.<sup>1</sup> As in 1665, when he also travelled inland, Raja di Hilir appears to have actually reached the king. In March a letter arrived from "Seri Sultan Ahmad Syah Coninck van Minangcabou" acknowledging both this and the earlier visit. This information is vaguely worded in Pits' letter and tends to suggest that Pits supposed the king and the *Bendahara* to be living in the same place.<sup>2</sup> Raja di Hilir was one of the two envoys who had actually reached the king in 1665 and in March the king sent a letter acknowledging both this and the earlier visit.<sup>3</sup> The letter is brief and acknowledges the good tidings that the coast lands are peaceful. The king informed Pits that he was sending some of his people to the coast to give him a report on conditions there and also to make the ruler's wishes known to Pits.<sup>4</sup> These were the two envoys who succeeded in reaching the ruler in 1665 and the letter appears to be referring to that visit.

This letter, at least in the copied and translated form in which it has survived in the VOC archive, lacks the elaborate royal language and listed titles and possessions of the king which figure in other royal letters.<sup>5</sup> There is evidence to suggest, however, that the letter did indeed come from "the king" and not from *Bendahara Putih*. Like other missives from the interior this letter carries the name and the royal seal of "Seri Sultan Ahmad Syah Coninck van Minangcabou". Among those who travelled to the coast with the king's letter was Khatib Seri Negeri.<sup>6</sup> Later

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<sup>1</sup> "Te raporteren dat omtrent het hof van den manecabouse maijt. en den bandhaer poetij alles in ruste ende vrede zij." Pits to Batavia 20th February 1668, OB 1669 VOC 1268 f. 831r. See also Pits to Batavia 24th January 1668, OB 1669 VOC 1268 f. 829r.

<sup>2</sup> As in many cases the information about local doings in the VOC letters is tantalisingly spare. Raja di Hilir is said to have travelled to the Sungai Capajan hills and to have received an assurance that the hill merchants would visit the coast again when the fasting month ("pouassae") was over, VOC 1268 f. 831r-v.

<sup>3</sup> Translated letter from the Minangkabau king received at Padang on the 30th March 1668, OB 1669 VOC 1268 f. 847r. A printed copy of this letter and Pits' reply may be found in Appendix II and III to Kroeskamp's book.

<sup>4</sup> VOC 1268 f. 847r. "Tot welcken eijnde wij geresolveert zijn geworden, 3 onser huijs dienaers tot de strant landen, en voorts naer Padang aen UE: aftevaerdigen, om oochschijnelijk te sien wat het gedoente sij van den hollantsen commandeur den panglima raedja ende de verdere Padangse regenten, en off sij oock alle goodes insettingen ende gebooden, als mede haer beloften aftervolgen en onderhouden waer van deselve reeden en bewijs aen onse drie afgesondene sullen hebben te geeven die ons wederom opt spoedigste van alle haere bevindinge naar waerheijt kennise sullen doen hebben."

<sup>5</sup> These were sometimes considered to be superfluous and were omitted in the process of copying local letters.

<sup>6</sup> This is evident not from the King's letter, in which the Khatib is not mentioned, but from Pits' reply. VOC 1268 f. 848r.

in 1668, when envoys from Padang visited the court and reported upon conditions there in detail, Khatib Seri Negeri was described as one of the two great "priests" of the kingdom and was seen to be an important court functionary.<sup>7</sup> This would suggest a direct link between the embassy and letter of March 1668 and the king with whom the Dutch were attempting to make contact.<sup>8</sup>

One further slight anomaly in the March letter is that it addresses Pits with the title *Bentara Raja*. In 1667 when Verspreet received his commission of king's *stadhouder*, Pits had also been recognised as his successor and had been granted the Malay title of *Bentara Raja*.<sup>9</sup> If all the letters from the interior which had been received by Pits since that time were from the Bendahara who, as Kroeskamp argues, kept the real nature of his relations with the Company hidden from the king, then it is hard to explain how the ruler knew of Pits' title. While it is possible that Pits himself had used the title in a letter to the king about which we do not know, this reference to Pits' 1667 title does suggest that the king might not have been quite as much "in the background" as has been suggested.

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<sup>7</sup> VOC 1272 f. 1031r. The king's letter mentions the following envoys: Paduka Seri Maharaja; Raja Muhammad, Lela di Raja and Raja Indera Cahaya. Pits' reply refers to the Orangkayas Paduka Seri Maharaja; Lela di Raja and Raja Indera Cahaya, who are described as the chiefs of the "Tiga Laras", as well as the two royal cohorts (*lijf trawanten*) Raja Muhammad and Khatib Seri Negeri. Both letters were, of course, translated from Malay and copied out, probably by Dutch scribes at Batavia, before the copies to which we now have access were sent home to Amsterdam.

<sup>8</sup> Among the other representatives of the court who accompanied the March letter was one who was identified as "Paduka Seri Maharaja" in the King's letter. We have already seen that a Paduka Seri Maharaja Lela was involved in most of the embassies which took place between the Dutch and the interior in 1666 and 1667. At the actual court, as we shall see, "Seri Paduka Maharaja" was described as the first *menteri*. Whether this was one and the same as the envoy who used to bear the name Nakoda Marabat is not clear.

<sup>9</sup> VOC 1264 f. 282v.

## APPENDIX THREE

## The British in West Sumatra

An English presence in south west Sumatra was first established in June 1684 when representatives from Madras landed in Bengkulu. Clement du Jardin, the leader of the expedition, made an agreement with the rulers of Bengkulu and left deputies there before sailing on to Inderapura. There he contracted an agreement with the 20 Menteri while Sultan Muhammad Syah was away fighting in Menjuto.<sup>1</sup> Sultan Muhammad Syah later confirmed the agreement with the English much to the annoyance of the VOC.<sup>2</sup> In 1685 a second English expedition under Ralph Ord arrived at Bengkulu and made an exclusive contract with the chiefs there. In September 1685 Ord departed for Inderapura, leaving behind his deputies Benjamin Bloome and Joshua Charlton.<sup>3</sup> Ord's arrival in Inderapura is mentioned in a Sumatra Factory letter from Bengkulu to Madras of 8th May 1686 and also by the Dutch records which give a clearer picture of these events.<sup>4</sup> Ord did not live long and the British settlement at Inderapura was subsequently abandoned.<sup>5</sup>

Ord's letters preserved in the *Sumatra Factory Records* and *Java Factory Records* give very little idea about what went on at Inderapura.<sup>6</sup> The Dutch noted at the time that Sultan Muhammad Syah of Inderapura was away fighting against Menjuto, but that the *Menteri* had signed the country away to the English without so much as informing Padang to whom they were already bound by contract.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> H. Dodwell (ed.) *Records of Fort St. George: Letters to Fort St. George*, vol. 3 (1684-5), p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 103-4.

<sup>3</sup> P. Wink, "Eenige achiefstukken betreffende de vestiging van de Engelsche factorij te Benkoelen in 1685", *TBG*, vol. LXIV (1924), p. 464-473. For a description of Ord's earlier intention to establish a trading post at Pariaman see J. Kathirithamby-Wells, *The British West Sumatran Presidency (1760-85)*, pp. 22-23 and J. Bastin, *The British in West Sumatra 1685-1825*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press (1965), p. xi-xii.

<sup>4</sup> Bastin p. 32 and Marsden p.451; see also Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, IV p. 809-10.

<sup>5</sup> Ord's death is mentioned in a letter from Bengkulu to Madras of 8th May 1686 SFR, Wink and Bastin :30.

<sup>6</sup> Ord was the Chief and therefore he seems to have made his reports straight to Madras. It may be that a more detailed account is held in the ? records.

<sup>7</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. IV, p. 810.



## APPENDIX FOUR

Description of the *Surat Cap* Manuscripts discussed in Chapter Seven

## 1. Newbold\Dulaurier\Korn

Newbold noted that this letter bore "a strong resemblance to the Menangkabawe document published by Mr Marsden".<sup>1</sup> The letter was described by Newbold as a "*Tromba [Tambo] Menangkabowe*" brought over to the Minangkabau-inhabited states of the peninsula by Raja Labu, the last representative of the Yang Dipertuan to rule there.<sup>2</sup> The same translated letter is also reproduced in J.H. Moor's *Notices of the Indian Archipelago*, in a chapter which was written in 1834 by Newbold himself.<sup>3</sup> Newbold does not provide the Malay text from which he translated the "*Trombo*" or offer any information which would help to trace the original. And, like the letter translated by Marsden, Newbold's English rendering of the text contributes to its strange effect.

In 1845 Dulaurier published, a collection of Malay letters intended to be used as language exercises in the Ecole Royale et Speciale des Langues Orientales Vivantes.<sup>4</sup> One of these is a facsimile of the *jawi* text of Newbold's "*Trombo*". According to Dulaurier the document was given to the Société Asiatique in Paris by Newbold. He describes it as a copy of a "*Tromba-Pousaka*" (*Tambo-Pusaka*).<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately the manuscript can no longer be located in the Société Asiatique, but Dulaurier's facsimile enables one to see how the seals and medallions are arranged, in this case, above and below the letter.<sup>6</sup> The text itself is 19 lines long.

The third copy of this letter is that found in the V.E. Korn Collection. In this case the document is a typed Malay romanization of the letter, the text of which corresponds closely with the *jawi* MS presented by Dulaurier. No information is

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<sup>1</sup> Newbold, *British Settlements*, vol. II, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. In this instance Newbold was referring to Sungei Ujong, Rembau, Johol and Srimenanti.

<sup>3</sup> J.H. Moor, *Notices of the Indian Archipelago and Adjacent countries*, first published London, 1837. Reprinted London: Cass, 1968, pp.255-261.

<sup>4</sup> Ed. Dulaurier, *Chrestomathie Malaye et Pieces Diplomatiques Ecrites en Malay*, (Paris, 1845).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.11. In the *Chrestomathie Malaye* the *jawi* text is produced in typed form with Dulaurier's notes on the text as well as a facsimile of the actual document, which is reproduced here. According to Dulaurier the document sent to the Societe Asiatique by Newbold contains pencil annotations which Dulaurier has incorporated in his notes to the text.

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Dr Henri Chambert-Loir for investigating the whereabouts of this letter. According to Dr Chambert-Loir's enquiries the letter was among a group of manuscripts which were given to the Bibliotheque National some years ago and which can no longer be traced. Personal communication.

available as to origin and history of this piece.<sup>7</sup>

We are dependent upon Newbold's authority for the identification of the document with the Minangkabau prince Raja Labu. Newbold's translation contains a sentence which appears to refer to the bearer of the letter. This reads: "These are the credentials of the beloved grandson of the Eang-de-pertuan of Paggaruyong".<sup>8</sup> The Malay text may not, however, be entirely consistent with this translation. It reads: "Ialah bab n-m-b-a-s-t habib yang dipertuan Pagarruyung".<sup>9</sup>

According to Newbold, Raja Labu brought the "pompous credentials" with him, along with a letter from the Sultan of Siak, when he came from Sumatra in 1826.<sup>10</sup> The ruler of Siak's letter is not available but Siak is mentioned in the list of rulers related to Pagarruyung, which is not always the case in such letters. There is nothing in the letter to connect it specifically with Sri Menanti and Rembau and no specific mention is made which would indicate that this letter was intended to introduce a new ruler. On the contrary it reads more like a general letter of introduction. The only reference which indicates that the letter was intended to be used farther afield than Sumatra is the extensive list of places in which protection is claimed for the bearer. These include places on the Peninsula such as the island of Penang, "Pulau Pinang", and Malacca, as well Java and parts of Sumatra.

P. E. De Josselin de Jong has published an article in which he suggests that there is no reliable evidence that a dynasty of rulers from Minangkabau did actually rule in Negeri Sembilan, and that the only such prince sent was Raja Labu whose existence is confirmed by Newbold and by the letter discussed here.<sup>11</sup> Newbold's evidence is considered by Josselin de Jong to be reliable because his account is nearly contemporary with the events he relates.

Neither Newbold or De Josselin de Jong make the point that there is no explicit link between Raja Labu and the letter other than Newbold's own assertion, and De Josselin de Jong tends to treat the existence of the letter as firm evidence of Raja Labu's claim. While accepting Newbold's contemporary account of these events De Josselin de Jong casts doubt on Newbold's version of the earlier history of the "dynasty", even though it relates to events which had taken place only twenty years before Newbold wrote. According to Newbold the fourth prince who was sent from Minangkabau was Raja Linggang Laut who succeeded Raja Itam in 1808 and died in 1824.<sup>12</sup> Although De Josselin de Jong does not positively disprove the existence of Raja Linggang Laut, he suggests that Raja Labu is the only prince whose connection with

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<sup>7</sup> No details are given in the catalogue of the Korn Collection produced by F.G.P. and Dr Jaquet is not aware of any other source of information concerning items in the collection. Personal communication.

<sup>8</sup> Newbold, *British Settlements*, p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> Dulaurier, *Chrestomathie Malaye*, p. 58 note 62. In the pencil annotations on the Societe Asiatique MS the word n-m-b-a-s-t is interpreted as n-w-a-s-a which Dulaurier gives as "credentials, letters of credit". I am grateful to Daud Mobini-Kesheh, who informs me that n-w-a-s-t is a Persian term for grandchild. *Habib* means "Dear to God" and is a title given to descendants of the prophet, Wilkinson (1959).

<sup>10</sup> *British Settlements*, p. 81.

<sup>11</sup> P.E. de Josselin de Jong, "The Dynastic Myth of Negeri Sembilan", *BKI*, 131 (1975) 2 & 3 pp. 277-308.

<sup>12</sup> *British Settlements*, pp. 87- 89.

Minangkabau is authenticated. It is possible, however, that some evidence for Linggang Laut's Minangkabau credentials can be found in MS No. 2 here, Cod. Or. 2241.

## 2. Cod. Or. 2241

This piece - a *jawi* copy of a letter - is part of a large collection of Malay letters catalogued under the number Cod. Or. 2241. The present copy is written on facing sides of a large sheet of folded paper which measures 55 by 42 centimeters when spread out. Lines of text represent the places where, in an original letter, one might expect to see medallions such as the ones described above. One medallion is drawn here and inside the circle is written a note to the effect that there are nine seals with writing in them and one large seal which is not legible.

The collection of letters of which this is a part is described in an article by H.C. Klinkert.<sup>13</sup> Klinkert describes the letter as a copy of a writing by a Minangkabau prince named Linggang Lakoet and compares it with the Dulaurier letter discussed above and to the piece published by van Hasselt. According to Klinkert Cod. Or. 2241 was copied either in Bintan or Banten on the 10th of Dzulkaidah 1215, which is the Hijra equivalent of 1800 A.D.. Klinkert would appear to base this upon two notes, one within the letter itself and another inscribed on a second folded sheet accompanying the letter.

These two notes are as follows. On the outer sheet is written in *jawi* script "Alamat surat ini dari anak raja Minangkabau yang bernama Tuan Raja Linggang Lakut jua adanya". This slightly ambiguous wording seems to indicate that the letter was from a child of the ruler of Minangkabau whose name was Raja Linggang Lakut or Laut. Underneath this inscription is a Dutch note reading: "Copy van het Maleidshe geschrift van den Maninkabsche Prins". On the other side of the same sheet is written "Den 10 April 1800."<sup>14</sup> Within the text of the letter itself there is a note which refers to the date. This reads:

Tersurat dalam negeri Banten tahun dal: 1245/1215 pada 10 hari bulan dzualk'aedah pada hari ahad. Adapun ini surat disalin anak raja Minangkabau punya surat dalam negeri Banten 10 hari bulan dzalk'aedah pada hari ahad adanya.

The date 1245/15 is ambiguous, although the fact that Klinkert, a great Malay scholar, read it as 1215 is a strong incentive to chose that reading. It is also the Hijra equivalent of 1800 A.D. which matches the Dutch date written on the outside of the letter. A reading of 1245 would be the equivalent of 1829 A.D.. Neither of these dates allows us to link the letter directly with the Raja Linggang Laut who is said to have represented the Minangkabau royal family on the Peninsula. As we have seen, he arrived in Rembau, according to Newbold, in 1808 and died in 1824. It is possible, however, that a Minangkabau prince named Linggang Laut was travelling generally in the archipelago with this letter and later moved to Rembau either with or without the direct involvement of the Minangkabau ruler.

At the end of the Cod. Or. 2241 text we read:

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<sup>13</sup> H. C. Klinkert, "Verzamelingen van Maleische brieven, voorhanden in de Rijksbibliotheek te Leiden gecatalogiseerd door H. C. Klinkert", *TNI*, vol. II (1882), pp. 81-103 and 161-20.

<sup>14</sup> The date could also be read as 1801.

This seal letter from the Yang Dipertuan of Pagaruyung honours Tuanku nan Muda. The purpose of this is so that wherever he may travel, if any slave or subject does not show honour to Daulat Yang Dipertuan Muda, in whatever state, then they will be struck by the *besi kawi* of Yang Dipertuan Sakti in Pagaruyung. Whoever denies the truth of this surat s-t-a-m-y will be consumed by the *besi kawi* of Pagaruyung because rulers represent God in the world. Slaves and subjects in each port and each state should know that this is so.<sup>15</sup>

Raja Linggang Lakut may have been one and the same as the Tuanku nan Muda mentioned in the note. There is insufficient evidence firmly to link this Raja Linggang Lakut with the Raja Linggang Laut who is said to have ruled in Seri Menanti from 1808-1824, but the close similarity between this letter and that which Newbold connects with Raja Labu does suggest the possibility. Although the format used for such letters exhibits standard features and similarities of wording and style, such a close correspondence is unusual. It is also worth noting that one of the nine rulers who are described in MS 6 below as descending from Minangkabau in order to rule the coastal regions was a Sultan Linggang Alam who was sent to Rembau. In 1684, we have seen, the ruler at Pagaruyung gave Dias a credential for use among the ruler's subjects in Rembau.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. ML 438

This MS may not have been in the Jakarta Manuscript collection (then belonging to the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen) when van Ronkel prepared his catalogue to the collection in 1909. He does not mention it. In the register of items contained in the collection ML 483 is described as a genealogical list of the kings of Pagaruyung which was a gift to the collection from Ch. van der Plas. In fact this is a *surat cap* like those already described. It can only be said to be a genealogical list in the sense that, like other *surat cap*, it traces the family's descent from Iskandar Dzulkarnain. The three seals on the MS are no longer legible in their entirety. The seals all employ the lotus-shaped stamp of the Pagaruyung kings and it appears, from what is legible of the six line inscription within, that the same seal has been applied three times. All three impressions have been applied at a different angle to the main text. A possible reconstruction of the inscription within these seals is as follows:

al wa thak  
ba'aniat Allah  
al-Sultan al'azim  
Maharaja Diraja ibn Sultan  
Abdu 'l Jalil Muazim

<sup>15</sup> Cod. Or. 2241 "Inilah bab surat cap yang dipertuan Pagaruyung dikurniakan kepada Tuanku nan Muda kerana beliau akan menjalani hamba ra'ayat sekalian 'alam Barang siapa tiada muliakan daulat Yang Dipertuan Muda barang di mana negeri kena bisa kawi Yang Dipertuan nan Sakti di Pagaruyung. Barang siapa mendustakan surat s-t-a-m-y ini dimakan bisa kawi Pagaruyung kerana raja ganti Allah atas dunia supaya hamba ra'ayat tiap-tiap bandar dangan taip-tiap negeri tahu adanya."

<sup>16</sup> De Haan, "Naar Midden Sumatra", p. 350.

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The ten medallions at the top of the scroll contain the names of the rulers of Siak, Sungai Paguh, Rokan[m], Inderagiri, Banten, Pariaman, Jambi, Inderapura, Palembang and Aceh. These are presented in the usual format. The tails trailing below the medallions recount, as in other letters, that this was the first ruler in the *negeri* which then extended into other, named, regions.

The medallions are enclosed within a spire shaped sub-section of the MS which echoes the spire of the building represented below. This spire is reminiscent of the traditional pointed roofs of Minangkabau. The pillars supporting the roof and the finials on top of the pillars and other minor "roofs" are also strongly reminiscent of the finials used in Minangkabau architecture today. While the inner panel of the upper and lower gables in this illustration are, again, very similar to the decorative panels within the gables within Minangkabau houses, the "building" is in other ways unlike Minangkabau architecture as we know it. External pillars supporting roofs are not used even in the oldest *rumah gadang*, or traditional Minangkabau family dwellings, some of which are at least two hundred years old. Djafri Datuk Bandaro Lubuk Sati has made a romanisation of this MS which has been consulted here, although it differs from the transliteration of the MS presented here.<sup>17</sup> In notes appended to this romanisation Datuk Lubuk Sati commented that the structure represented on the MS was an older style Minangkabau mosque.

It has not been possible to identify a mosque in the style of the illustration in ML 483. The impression offered by this turreted and spiked building is of a palace or *balai* based upon Minangkabau architectural style, but much less solid than the conventional Minangkabau *rumah gadang*. Unfortunately there is no available model of a royal palace at Pagaruyung or any evidence that such a building would have been any different from other Minangkabau houses. The dwelling of the Pagaruyung royal family was destroyed by fire in the early nineteenth century and more modern reconstructions of an *istana* and *rumah gadang* in Pagaruyung follow the familiar style of Minangkabau house building although on a much grander scale. A two hundred year old *rumah gadang* belonging to descendants of a branch of the Pagaruyung royal family living at Balun in Sungai Paguh also conforms to the familiar style of Minangkabau architecture.

Some of the decorative architectural features of this "*balai*" or mosque are intended to represent items of the Pagaruyung royal regalia. The writing around the top of the illustration refers to these items. Thus the inscriptions state, for instance that:

This is the place of the Kamat wood which originates from ... and which represents all who assume the position of raja.

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<sup>17</sup> *Tambo-Darah*, edited by Djafri Datuk Bandaro Lubuk Sati, Photocopied pamphlet held at the Istana Pagaruyung in Minangkabau. The present author discovered Datuk Lubuk Sati's romanization after having consulted the MS in Jakarta and having prepared a romanization. The two romanizations differ in that Datuk Lubuk Sati has used a Minangkabau style spelling pattern, whereas my own transliteration has followed the *jawi* consonants marked in the text, reverting to Ejaan Baru where the vowels are not indicated. The options and difficulties surrounding transliteration of Minangkabau manuscripts written in *jawi* are discussed in Jane Drakard (ed.), *Sejarah Raja-Raja Barus*, Jakarta and Bandung: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988, Introduction. In all cases here the method of transliteration used follows that outlined in my 1988 discussion. The remarks made here concerning Datuk Lubuk Sati's romanization also apply to the *Tambo nan Selapan* text. In both cases I have benefitted from reading another approach to the manuscripts.

This is the place of the pure gold belonging to God's representative on earth.

This is the place of the gold which with the power of God resembles a man.

This is the place of the crown of the prophet Sulaiman. The brightness of its light illuminates it with the grace of God most high.

This is the place of the loom Sangsyita Kala which moves itself with the will of God.

Below this again are two clearly distinguishable representations of actual items of regalia:

This is the pennant which marks the greatness of Daulat Yang Dipertuan.

This is the state umbrella of Daulat Yang Dipertuan nan Syati.

The presence of these items of royal regalia belonging to God's Caliph on earth suggest that it was intended that the structure have both a royal and a religious flavour.

The whole design is supported by a further layer of pillars and grouped floral designs. Below this is the text of the letter itself. This letter is comparatively lengthy and contains approximately 1743 words in 87 lines. No watermark can be identified in the paper since the whole fragile scroll has been attached to a stiff backing sheet. The scroll appears to have been constructed by joining together separate sheets of paper. The principal part of the letter is written in very clear and regular script. Black ink predominates and red is used to emphasis special names, references to God and phrases in Arabic. According to Datuk Lubuk Sati the manuscript was known as *Tambo Darah* because it was written in ink the colour of blood. No such reference occurs within the text.

Among the *kebesaran* listed in this text is the seal of Daulat Yang Dipertuan in Pagaruyung. The actual words used here are "ialah sultan yang menaruhkan cib tanda tangan titah daulat yang dipertuan di Pagaruyung juga adanya". The letters c-y-b are not found in any dictionary as an equivalent of cap or even cab but, as we saw above, this version of the word is also found in other *surat cap*. *Tanda tangan* means manual sign or in modern usage a signature. Whether this refers to the *cap* of the ruler in general or specifically to a signature is unclear. It is worth noting, however, that among the items of regalia still in the possession of the Pagaruyung family in 1931 was a stamp or seal of a name or signature. This is said to read Chatm 'Abd al-Majid Muhammad Ibrahim and is pictured in plate 11.<sup>18</sup> The "*cib tanda tangan*" would appear to refer to a separate item of royal *kebesaran* and the *surat cap* itself is also described as a *cib*.

The MS goes on to state that "We grant to those who bear this *cib* that wherever they may take it, be it to Kampar Kiri or to Kampar Kanan, to Aceh which is the verandah of Mekah, to Java or to Batavia etc., that no-one must harm those who carry the *cib*". This implies that the letter itself is regarded as a *cib* or *cap* and a little later on it is also referred to as this *cib besar*, this "great seal". As in other letters the dire consequences of disregarding the message and harming those who carry the letter are detailed and the royal curse or *besi kawi* of Pagaruyung is held over the disobedient. This closing passage of main text also states again the message of the opening section quoting God's supposed words, "*Aku jadikan raja di dalam dunia akan ganti Aku*" - "I have placed rulers in the world to represent me".

The final part of this long scroll is divided from the rest by a floral motif decoration. The bottom section contains a block of text which appears to have been executed in a different hand from the rest and which is not easily legible. This note

<sup>18</sup> F.D.K. Bosch "De Rijksieraden van Pagar Roejoeng", *Oudheidkundige Verslag*, (1930), p.208.

may have been added to the MS at a later stage and, in so far as it can be deciphered, it appears to offer some information about the owners of the MS.<sup>19</sup>

This is difficult to translate, especially because so many words and proper names are hard to identify. The note appears to introduce Datuk Permato nan Putih, to tell us who his father was and where his home was. They were descended from Datuk Pemancu Maharaja Lelo who had died under or with the Raja Alam. What follows is obscure, but it seems to refer to a journey to the *rantau* in search of knowledge held by the rulers of the two seats and by the Raja Alam between 1818 and 1829. As we saw earlier the Raja nan dua Selo refers to the Raja Adat and the Raja Ibadat. The period 1818-1829 would include the Padri war and the statement may refer us to attacks upon the royal family and to their defensive movements during this period. The note then appears to state that this was the inheritance that Datuk Pemancu Maharaja Lelo passed on to his descendants. All the descendants of the Raja in Pagaruyung are obliged to inform their descendants and this must not be altered.

It is difficult to know what the connection is between this note and the rest of the MS. It is possible that the note was added later, although that would imply that the letter was prepared with an empty space intended for such an addition. The different and much poorer handwriting used here certainly suggests a different scribe. The first three lines of the note have been smudged by what looks like water, although again it is not possible to know whether this happened later or at the time of writing. The dates used only confirm that the note itself was written after 1829, and do not allow us to date the whole MS with any confidence. One conclusion which might be drawn upon the basis of the note is that the importance of educating their subjects and descendants was one obligation of the Pagaruyung ruler or rulers.

#### 4. *Tambo Asa*

*Tambo Asa* is the name used for this and another longer MS by its current guardians, the Yayasan Minang Sadjati. I am grateful to the Yayasan and particularly to Roestam Anwar Angku Tumanggung of Padang who has discussed the MSS with me, given me a copy of his pamphlet concerning the MSS and other activities of the Yayasan, and who also made available to me photocopies of *jawi* texts. These texts are regarded with considerable awe by members of the Yayasan due largely to the manner in which they came to identify them.

This is described in a recently published pamphlet written by Sofyan nan Sati and Roestam Anwar Angku Tumanggung.<sup>20</sup> They explain how Sofyan nan Sati came by the MSS through the medium of a series of dreams and the intervention of a mysterious old man name Atok. One day Atok, hitherto encountered by Sofyan nan

<sup>19</sup> An approximate transliteration of these thirteen lines reads as follows:

Tuanku Permata Lelo nan Putih anak dari Datu' Baginda Khatib?. Ini cucu tuanku laras r-w-d-w [ datuk Lubuk Sati has Suruasol] Minangkerbau keturun sepanjang adatnya dalam kampung p-r-s/m-t nan Gadang. Cucuran perketurunan dari s-y-d-w-k-a-t/n-y k-a-b-r Datu' Pemancu' Maharaja Lelo mati di kuntu di bawah raja 'Alam dahulunya ka rantau p-b-d-y [or menjandi?] orang cari/k? pandai[?] oleh raja nan Dua Selo serta Raja 'Alam tahun 1818 sampai 1829. Maka itu ini cucu Raja turun-temuran kepada cucu dan warisnya duli Datu' Pemancu' Maharaja Lelo ialah nan tersebut diatas. Maka segala keturunan Raja di Pagaruyung wajibnya ma'lum[?] kepadanya turun-temurun segala anak-anak cucunya tidak boleh m-w-y-l-y?

<sup>20</sup> *Tambo Asa (Minang)*, Pamphlet prepared by Sofyan nan Sati and Roestam Anwar Angku Tumanggung and published privately in Padang by Yayasan Minang Sadjati, 1989.

Sati only in dreams, came to Sofyan's house and presented him with two parcels, one of which contained an old Kris. Sofyan found the kris to have magical powers and the ability to respond to letters in either spoken or written form. By dint of using the kris as the central axis on a Ouija board Sofyan and a group of companions were able to obtain information about the whereabouts of the two MSS and various grave sites which they visited. The group continue to consult the special kris and are seeking funds from the Governor of West Sumatra to develop local interest in the powers of the kris and the information it has vouchsafed. So far they have not revealed where the texts were found, the circumstances of their safekeeping, or whether they were discovered together.

The *surat* is written in a different hand from that of the longer MS and the actual relationship between them is uncertain. Indeed it may be that they were not originally related at all since the letter refers to itself as a *surat* and reads like another letter of credence. It seems unlikely, therefore, that it was used as the introduction or opening to the *Tambo* as is the case with other examples of this genre of material. It has not been possible to view the original MS or to determine where it came from. Informants thought that Batu Bara was a likely location and, since the accompanying *Tambo* deals in some detail with the nearby region of Rokan, the north eastern part of Sumatra does seem to be a possible "home" for the MSS.

The romanisation upon which the following comments are based was prepared from the photocopied MS made available by Roestam Anwar Angku Tumanggung. This has been compared to the published romanization, but differs from it in some respects. Unfortunately the top section of the scroll which contains seals and medallions is badly damaged and had produced a very unclear photocopy which is itself a copy of a copy. An accurate description of the physical state of the MS is therefore difficult. The manuscript's size, the paper used and other details remain unknown. Two Pagaruyung *cap* are visible sitting at the top of the scroll one above the other. The presence of a third could easily be obscured by tears in the MS in this area. The lotus shape of the Pagaruyung *cap* is visible, but the inscription within the seals and other writing alongside them cannot be deciphered.

The medallions are visible and are arranged one above the other in a row of ten. The inscription within and beside these circles is not legible in all cases, however. Those which are legible introduce the rulers of Banten, Palembang, Inderagiri and Siak. According to the published account the places named here appear to be "Bugih, Aceh, Bantan, Palembang, Barunai, Inderagiri, Siak, Kalimantan, Tanjung Karang, Jambi, Minang and Perak", which includes, presumably the larger seals. It is not, unfortunately, possible to verify this list without viewing the actual manuscript.

The letter itself contains 99 lines of text in a narrow scroll. The format of the letter is similar to that of others considered above. The first eight lines are in Arabic and the letter opens with a brief description of creation, of the three royal brothers of whom the Maharaja Diraja in Pagaruyung was one. It quickly proceeds to a list of the *kebesaran* of the Pagaruyung ruler, 33 of which are mentioned. After this the message the letter commences with the words: "Itulah titah daulat Yang Dipertuan nan Sati dari Pagaruyung." The bearer of the letter is described as a "raja" and the Sultan requests that any of his descendants who meet the bearer on sea or land, in the rantau or in a port, are obliged to look after him. This should apply in Solok in Kota Labuh in Bangkulu, Palembang, Jambi, Inderagiri, Batu Bara, Pulau Pinang in Jawa and Batawi as well as in all regions on sea or land. Those who do harm to the bearer of the letter, and alter the *adat* of past times, will be struck by a curse (*kena kutu'*) and will not find peace for a thousand nights and a thousand days. They will be assailed by the *daulat* of Yang Dipertuan Iskandar Dzulkarnain and that of Sultan Seri Maharaja



Diraja in *negeri* Pagaruyung. The *besi kawi* is then mentioned, the effects of which are, among other things, that a cursed person who enters the jungle will be eaten by tigers.

This letter is unlike most in the sense that it is signed or the sender is identified. It is said to come from the Bendahara of Sungai Tarap in the presence of the Besar Empat Balai who are listed as the Indomo in Suruaso, the Makhudum in Sumanik, Tuan Kadi in Padang Ganting and Tuan Gadang in Batipuh. The letter closes with the words, "written in Pagaruyung". This useful information shows that such a letter could be sent in the name of the ruler and that what appears to have been an apparent administration in Pagaruyung did act in his name.

## 5. Van Hasselt (Jambi)

Aside from the Newbold/Dulaurier letter, this is the only example of a Pagaruyung seal-letter to have received detailed attention in a published source.<sup>21</sup> The work in question formed the second part of a volume dealing with ethnography and language which was published on the basis of research undertaken during the *Sumatra-Expeditie* of 1877-1879. Van Hasselt describes the document as "*Een Mangkabosche Geloofsbrief*" indicating credentials or a letter of credence. Van Hasselt records that Heer Schouw Santvoort probably came across the letter in Jambi in the course of the Sumatra Expedition.<sup>22</sup>

Like other examples this is an open letter from the Sultan of Minangkabau requesting that the bearer be well treated in the countries he visits. According to van Hasselt the letter was sent by "Soeltan-Daulat-Mohamad-Noer-Sjah-Alboekas" and the bearer was his relation "Hadji-Dajang-Hapat".<sup>23</sup> This identification is not bourn out by a close reading of the letter, however. The question of sender and bearer in this instance is complicated and will require a detailed discussion. It seems that the letter originated from, or was intended to be taken as originating from, the Pagaruyung ruler. The bearer, whose seal is also affixed to top of the letter, is referred to as *saudara* or brother by the King and was named Tuanku Haji Dayang Daulat Sultan Muhammad Nur Bugis, or more simply Sultan Daulat Muhammad Nur Syah al-Bugis.

The contents of the letter are broadly similar to the other examples discussed here. The opening section varies in that Sultan Iskandar Dzulkarnain is said here to have had seven children, four sons and three daughters. The names of the sons are those mentioned in medallion twelve above.<sup>24</sup> Twenty two *kebesaran* are listed and these are presented in the same repetitive and stylised format as in other *surat cap*. The final section of this letter is intriguing and is somewhat difficult to interpret. This is not least because parts of the actual script are unclear. The message can be broken down into several constituent parts: the first addresses these words of the Yang Dipertuan Sakti in Pagaruyung to a specific audience; the next introduces the bearer of the letter; and the third instructs those addressed as to how they must behave in relation to the bearer. Although the Malay is at times impenetrable because of the illegibility of the script an attempt has been made to paraphrase the message in

<sup>21</sup> A.L. van Hasselt, *De Talen en Letterkunde van Midden-Sumatra*, (Leiden 1881), pp. 170-180.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>23</sup> Van Hasselt, *De Talen*, p. 171.

<sup>24</sup> 1.8 - 1.10

English. Some parts of the Malay transliteration may be open to discussion as indeed may be this attempt at an English rendering.<sup>25</sup>

Verily Daulat Yang Dipertuan Sakti in Pagaruyung addresses all of his children and descendants, and all those of distinguished position such as the Bendahara in Sungai Tarab, Baginda Muda in Suruaso, Mangkudum in Sumanik and the Tuan Kadi in Padang Ganting.<sup>26</sup> He addresses those in all the valleys and all the great men in Andelas, all the learned men and all the slaves and subjects. All those who dwell in and around the area of Pulau Perca are commanded to give their attention.

Concerning our brother Tuhanku Haji Dayang Daulat Sultan Muhammad Nur Bugis the name of his country is.... We make him our deputy in order that he may instruct [*mengajarnya*] all our children and descendants in .....However far he may travel give attention to his teachings [*pengajarnya*] which are consistent with our religion [*sama agama kami*].

Do not make changes to our usages, either to our usage or to our ceremonial in this Pulau Perca.<sup>27</sup> If in another island (*pulau lain*) anyone alters the usages or the court which we employ in Pulau Perca, then in that other island whoever has.....In order that all who see this letter..... ... Tuanku Haji Dayang h-a-p-t Daulat Sultan Muhammad Nur.

We have given this *surat cab* [*c-b*] to our descendant .....wherever he may go recognise him and know him by his appearance and honesty. Wherever he may go assist him in order that he shall not be mistreated by wicked men. Thus it ends.

The first part of this address, which refers itself to a Minangkabau/Sumatran context, is authentic in its style and language. The four ministers who are addressed are mentioned in Minangkabau *Tambo* and in other *surat cap*. If this letter was indeed adapted by an outsider, such as a Bugis who wished to win the support of Minangkabau communities, this section would be almost certainly have been copied from an original *surat cap*. The geographical depiction of a Sumatran world in this and other letters will be considered in detail in the next chapter.

This address by the Yang Dipertuan Sakti in Pagaruyung, introducing Haji Dayang Daulat Sultan Muhammad Nur Bugis, clearly links the bearer of the letter to the seal above it. Although this is a lengthy name and title the wording of the address does suggest that one person is referred to and not two as Van Hasselt thought. The introduction of Haji Dayang Daulat Sultan Muhammad Nur Bugis is noteworthy for the emphasis it appears to place upon instruction and religion. The reading chosen here for some words, notably the key terms *mengajar*, *pengajar* and *agama* is uncertain and other crucial parts of the address remain unclear. A picture does emerge, however, of a holy man, a *haji*, who is clearly from another *negeri* and is

<sup>25</sup> Van Hasselt letter from Jambi, lines 25-36.

<sup>26</sup> These names represent the *Basa Ampek Balai* otherwise known as the four chief ministers of the old Minangkabau kingdom. Their names, which are found in the *Tambo* are usually given as Datuk Bandaharo of Sungai Tarab; Tuan Indomo of Suruasso; Tuan Makhudum of Sumanik; and Tuan Kadi of Padang Ganting. Sometimes also included in this group is the Tuan Gadang of Batipu.

<sup>27</sup> For an explanation of this translation the *angkatan* as ceremonial see Drakard, *A Malay Frontier*, pp. 119-21 and p. 125.

probably a Bugis whose religious teaching has received the approval and patronage of the Yang Dipertuan Sakti in Pagaruyung.

Part three of the address is particularly difficult to decipher. It appears to be concerned with the maintenance of Minangkabau forms especially in situations outside Minangkabau. This may be an indication that, if the letter is genuinely from Pagaruyung, Haji Dayang was expected to travel among Minangkabau *rantau* communities spread through the wider archipelago. This might go some way to explaining the number of kingdoms mentioned within the fifteen medallions. The final section of the address refers to the letter itself as a *surat cab* and asks for recognition and protection for the ruler's descendant. There is no mention here of the fearful royal curse or *sumpah* of Pagaruyung, the *besi kawi*.

It would be helpful if Haji Dayang and the *negeri* from whence he came could be identified by reference to the states mentioned in the medallions. These are not all legible and proper names for people and places are particularly difficult to identify. The Haji's designation as al-Bugis<sup>28</sup> indicates his Bugis origins and this appears also to be reflected in the presence of two medallions which refer to Makassar. This name appears to be spelt differently in the two cases.

## 6. *Tuanku nan Selapan*

Like the names *Tambo Darah* and *Tambo Asa*, *Tambo nan Selapan* appears to be a modern name used for the MS by its present day custodians. These names have been used here in recognition of that local use and in order to identify the individual *surat*.

This *jawi* MS is unusual in that it appears to incorporate material from another scrap of text which offers some insight into the organization and aspirations of the Pagaruyung court. The text is written on a scroll and, again, it was not possible to view the actual document although a photograph was made available. This photograph is kept in the Istana at Pagaruyung and I am grateful to Wisran Hadi and his family for making these materials available to me. Information about the size and other details of the physical character of this MS was not available. Like the *Tambo Darah* this MS has been romanized by Datuk Lubuk Sati who is particularly interested in the history of the Pagaruyung royal family. An independent romanization has also been prepared from the available reproductions of the MS and it will be cited in all quotations here.

According to Datuk Lubuk Sati, the original document is in the possession of the family of the Tuan Gadang at Batipu. Unhappily in the time allowed for research for this thesis in Indonesia it was not possible to visit the Tuan Gadang family. The scroll carries one seal in the top right hand of the letter. No medallions are used for the names of other rulers and ten of these are enumerated at the bottom of the scroll in numbered (roman) blocks of text rather than within circles. The seal is in a lotus shape, but this is slightly different in design from other examples of the Pagaruyung *cap*, with a blunt tip on the outer leaves of the flower.

The inscription within the seal is six lines long and, although it is not entirely clear, it appears to be the same inscription as that in MSS 1, 3 and 7. Datuk Lubuk Sati confirms this when he writes that the Tambo bears the seal of "Sultan Seri Maharajo Di Rajo Bin Sultan Abdullah Jalil". The slight variation in shape between this and other Abdu'l-Jalil seals from Pagaruyung may indicate that it was a copy of the usual

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<sup>28</sup> Within the seal at the top of the letter this is spelt b-w-k-s using kaf besar, on line 29 however the word is spelt b-w-g-s which is a conventional spelling of the word.

seal. While numerous true copies of the actual seal, or *stempel*, used by the Pagaruyung family now exist in Sumatra, the fact that this is not an accurate copy may be an indication that it was made under unusual circumstances or by someone outside the royal circle. As we shall see the letter was sent or prepared in its present form by the Tuan Gadang of Batipu and this may account for the unusual shape of the seal.

Up until line 42 the MS is a conventional *surat cap*. After that the tone of the text changes with the announcement of a date. In Malay this reads, "Pada sanat 1053 atau tahun 1050", or "In the hegera year 1053 or the year 1050." The christian equivalents of these dates are 1643 and 1640 A.D.. The message which follows records a meeting attended by all the raja, all the menteri, all the great men of the four *balai* ("sagala basa-basa nan ampek balai"), the Tuan Gadang in Batipu and all the panghulu, the pegawai, the tuanku, hulubelang and rakyat. All of these representatives of the three *luhak* presented themselves before Daulat Yang Dipertuan in Balai Janggo. The purpose of the gathering was the deputation of eight Sultans, the Sultan nan Selapan, who were to descend to the sea shore on the west, east, north and south coasts in order to become rulers in these coastal regions.

These descendants of Datuk Ketemanggungan, as they are described, are called upon to uphold the same usage as the rajas who remained in Pagaruyung, and they are said to have taken an oath of loyalty which would last as long as water flows downstream, as long as crows are black and as long as Gunung Berapi remains standing. All those gathered joined in taking an oath which was administered by drinking kris water. The Yang Dipertuan spoke to the Sultan nan Selapan and told them that none from the *luhak* Tanah Datar who travelled to the coast and joined these descendants of Ketemanggungan should be renounced. If they were, then the effects of the *besi kawi* would be felt. The number of *nagari* in the three *luhak* is also given as 677 which is the number said to be written in stone at Pagaruyung. Mention is also made of the responsibility of these Sultan for conveying harbour dues from the coast to Pagaruyung.<sup>29</sup>

This part of the *surat* is particularly interesting because of its early date and the information it contains concerning the claims of the Pagaruyung family to supremacy over the coastal rulers of Sumatra. There is evidence to suggest that it was copied from an external source. This is indicated not just by the early date at the beginning of the section, but also because the same passage of text appears elsewhere. It is published anonymously in the *Adatrechtbundels*.<sup>30</sup> According to the anonymous editor's introduction to the piece of text, the short MS, transliterated and published in the *Adatrechtbundels*, was held in the Leiden Library and was part of the van Ophuysen collection. It was transliterated by P.H. Van Ronkel, who prepared a catalogue to the Malay and Minangkabau manuscript collection of the Leiden University Library in 1921, and was published in the *Adatrechtbundels* with a brief Dutch summary of the contents. No catalogue number is provided and it has unfortunately not been possible, so far, to locate this, presumably very slight MS, in the van Ophuysen collection in Leiden. Although we do not have any information as to how van Ophuysen came by this MS it is possible to make some tentative observations concerning the status of the piece and its relationship to the *Tambo nan Selapan* letter. The document which was transliterated by van Ronkel is the same as that

<sup>29</sup> Difficult passage, get help before quoting.

<sup>30</sup> Anon., "Hoofdenbesluit uit de Zeventiende Eeuw (1636)",

*Adatrechtbundels*, vol. 33 (1930), pp. 277-8.

incorporated in the *Tambo nan Selapan* letter.

After the account of the meeting in Balai Janggo, the *Tambo Selapan* MS contains a series of numbered blocks of text which name ten rulers who were descended from Pagaruyung. These blocks appear to represent the medallions which would, presumably, have appeared on the original *surat cap*. This information is presented in the usual way and appears to belong to the *surat cap* part of the MS rather than to the Balai Janggo account, although the present MS is clearly a combination of both. This is indicated by the fact that the eight rulers commissioned to go to the coast in the Balai Janggo piece are not all the same as those mentioned in the numbered sections at the end of the letter. The former include the new rulers of Aceh, Palembang, Rambau Tambusai, Rau Mandailing, Bandar Sapuluh, Sungai Paguh, Siak Inderagiri, and Rambau, while the list of rulers at the end of the letter contains the names of the rulers of Pariaman, Aceh, Inderapura, Bantan, Sungai Paguh, Jambi, Palembang, Inderagiri, Siak, and Rokam. The indications are, therefore, that the Balai Janggo piece is an independent MS which has been incorporated within the letter and was probably in existence before the letter was prepared.

The Balai Janggo piece may have been held by the family of the Tuan Gadang of Batipu who is mentioned in the letter, or kept elsewhere in the highlands. It might then have been incorporated within the *Tambo nan Selapan* letter to add to the prestige of that document. The incorporation of significant pieces which relate to the general status of a family or place into a larger document about that family or place is not unusual in Sumatran literature. In the case of the Pagaruyung royal family this seems often to have been the case with *tambo*, and in *hikayat* and *undang-undang* produced in the outlying regions.

The question of the early date of the Balai Janggo piece cannot be resolved without access to an original document or to other external evidence. It is unlikely that a seventeenth century manuscript would still be extant in Sumatra today and unless the piece transliterated by van Ronkel is the original manuscript, it is likely that both the Leiden piece and the insert in the *Tambo nan Selapan* were made from a later copy. There is no a priori reason, however, to doubt the seventeenth century date in the piece even if it cannot be verified. The Balai Janggo account offers valuable evidence of how relations between the *darat* and *rantau* were perceived in the interior and comparison of this piece with other seventeenth century letters from Pagaruyung may help to establish its status as a reflection of Pagaruyung claims to authority in the coastal regions.

The *Tambo nan Selapan* appears to be yet another example of a letter of credence of the type usually sent out from the interior, it is not clear why in this case the letter remains in the interior with the family of the Taun Gadang of Batipu. There is no date on the letter, but it appears to have much in common with other examples from the early nineteenth century.

## 7. ML. 332 (Lebong)

In his discussion of the Jambi letter van Hasselt commented upon other examples of seal letters which had come to his notice. Of these he has most to say about a letter which belonged to a chief named Raja Pasirah of Muara-Amam in the Lebong region.<sup>31</sup> Van Hasselt considered this MS to be similar to the Jambi letter

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<sup>31</sup> Muara Aman and the region of Lebong lie within Propinsi Bengkulu, formerly the Residentie Benkoelen. This highland region is regarded by the Rejang of south west Sumatra as their homeland from which some *suku* moved out to coastal areas. Rejang village

except that there were fewer seals or inscribed circles surrounding the letter. The MS was in *jawi* script and van Hasselt states that he took a copy, although he only presents a Dutch translation of the text. The script, he says, was so "poor and slovenly" that some words could not be deciphered.

The bearer of the letter is not named in person, but in other respects it is similar to the text of other *surat cap*. The letter asks that those carrying it, who are said to be the people of the Yang Dipertuan of Pagaruyung, should be assisted in all the territories of the Kingdom of Minangkabau and from all who dwell there, be they high or low, people of the Hulu or people of the Hilir.

Despite the fact that van Hasselt omitted a Malay copy of this letter either in *jawi* or romanised script, it has been possible to identify a Malay copy of the letter in the manuscript collection of the National Library of Indonesia. This is a romanized text catalogued as ML. 332 and entitled "*Bab Radja-Radja*" by van Ronkel is his original catalogue of the collection.<sup>32</sup> The handwritten transliteration, which employs Ejaan Lama or Dutch-style spelling conventions, also contains a number of non-standard spelling patterns. In the manuscript register for the Malay MS collection the MS is described as a five page folio representing a copy of the "*bab radja-radja*", a *pusaka* in the possession of a *marga* in Lebong. It was presented to the collection by the Controleur of the Residency of Palembang I. de Clerq Zubi.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately no information is available as to who made the transliteration and why.

This MS letter can be linked with the one translated by van Hasselt not only by the stated connection with Lebong, but also by means of its contents. The two texts may be read side by side and both conclude with the words: "Pada Boelan sappar wallahoe alam"; or, as van Hasselt translates this, "In de maand Tsafar. En God weet it best." The letter is, as van Hasselt, commented, very similar to other examples such as the Jambi and Raja Labu letters. Indeed parts of this text may be read word for word alongside the Cod. Or. 5825 letter.

## 8. Cod. Or 4818

This *surat cap* in the Leiden University collection appears to be in its original form and it illustrates how decorative and impressive such documents were. This letter forms part of a portfolio of Malay letters and is described in a list of contents within the collection as a "Tambo Minangkabau".<sup>34</sup>

The letter is written on one large sheet of paper (approx 39 by 49 cms.), now very frail and damaged. The original paper has been fixed to a brittle backing sheet

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communities were genealogically homogeneous based on patrilineal descent and a type of patrilocal marriage form known as *jujur* (bride price). Rejang myths and literature trace their descent from Pagaruyung and Majapahit. See J.J.J.M. Wuisman, *Sociale Verandering in Bengkulu: Een Cultuur-Sociologische Analyse*, Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1985, Chapter One.

<sup>32</sup> Ph. S. van Ronkel, "Catalogus der Maleische Handschriften in het Museum van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen", VBG, vol.57, (1909), p. 463.

<sup>33</sup> Perpustakaan Nasional, Manuscript Catalogue, p. 311.

<sup>34</sup> The catalogue number for the portfolio is Cod. Or. 4818 and the letter is listed as no IV. It is shelved separately as Kast. 20367.

which prevents one from seeing any watermark in the original paper. The circular medallions and large black imprint of the Pagaruyung royal seal are arranged above the text of the letter. There are ten medallions and one more may be obliterated by a large tear in the top right-hand corner of the page. The letter holds 30 lines of text in addition to the medallions and several lines of text which radiate out below the circles and which I refer to here as "tails".

The closing section of the letter contains some specific information about its date and purpose. It relates that in the Hijra year 1231 (or 1815 A.D.) a descendant of the Yang Dipertuan Sakti in Pagaruyung arrived in Bangkahulu at an illegible location. His name is given as Sultan K-r-s, the rest being obliterated by the torn margin of the text. He was met by Datu' Muda Si Tumbuh whose place of residence appears to have been on the coast (he is referred to as "daripada orang telu") and to have been called Kawar Bandar. Datu' Muda is said to have made submission to the letter and assured the Sultan of his loyalty. The Sultan is then said to have given a *cap* to Datu' Muda.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately the end of the line here is missing and a word which seems to describe the *cap* is therefore not visible (*cap yang ... surat tambi ini*). The exact meaning of this passage is hard to determine, but it seems to imply that the *cap* was in some way related to the present letter "surat tambo ini".

The purpose of the *surat tambo* was that all God's servants should be apprised of its message. This is said to apply to the highest and the lowest, to the eldest and the youngest wherever the messenger may go on land or on sea. It would apply if he went, for instance, to Kampar Kiri as well as to Kampar Kanan, to Siak, to Batu Bara or to Malacca, Java and Betawi (Batavia) or to Bengal, Madras or Siam. It would also apply in Jambi and Palembang and in each foreign *negeri*. As in other letters this one commands that the bearer must not be harmed or put into bondage (*dipersanda2kan*). Anyone who disobeys this will be struck by God's decree (*dimakan kutu' Allah*) and by the curse of the Yang Dipertuan Sakti in Pagaruyung. The effect of the curse was that the cursed individual would not be blessed with followers and would not be fruitful. This curse, it is stated was handed down from earlier times and would apply in each *negeri*, each settlement, bay and outlying area. The Sultan commanded that none of his many emissaries should be harmed, and also reminded the recipients of the message of God's decree that rulers are put on earth to represent him, anyone who doubted this would be struck by the *besi kawi* of Daulat Yang Dipertuan in Pagaruyung.

Like other *surat cap* from Pagaruyung this letter appears to be in part an open letter of credence. Its purpose is a little ambiguous, however, in that the letter refers to specific events and to a recipient in Bangkahulu. This leaves the problem of determining for whom the *surat* was intended if the meeting between Sultan k-r-s and Datu' Muda had already occurred. Whether the letter was written in Pagaruyung and sent out with a bearer (presumably Sultan K-r-s), or was written in Bangkahulu in relation to the events it describes, is uncertain. We shall see that there are other examples of *surat cap* from Pagaruyung being apparently adapted to particular circumstances and the latter possibility might explain the fact that the letter appears to refer to itself retrospectively. Apart from these difficulties the form and style of the

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<sup>35</sup> Cod. Or. 4818 lines 24-5. "Kemudian menemui akan dia Datu' Muda Si Tumbuh[?] namanya daripada orang telu' k-a-w-r b-n-d-r nama dusunya. Maka ia membuat khidmat surat tulis dan yakinnya akan duli Sultan. Maka paduka seri Sultan memberi akan Datu' Muda cap yang \_\_\_\_ [l. 25] surat tambo ini beri diketahui oleh segala hamba Allah daripada hina mulia tua dan muda barang kemana ia pergi baik ke laut atau ke darat seperti ke Kampar Kiri baik Kampar Kanan ...."

*surat* is similar to other examples of the category of seal letters under study here.

### 9. Cod. Or. 5825 - *Minangkabausche Varia*

This piece is part of a collection of MSS in Leiden University Library which are grouped under the title *Minangkabausche Varia* and catalogued as Cod. Or. 5825. In the supplementary catalogue to this collection produced by Dr Ph. S. van Ronkel the actual letter is described as, "The beginning of a genealogy of the *Tambo Radjo* which is surrounded by ten *caps* of the kings of Aceh, Pariaman, Inderapura, Bintan etc. who are all said to descend from the King of Pagaruyung."<sup>36</sup>

This letter is relatively brief. The first eight lines are devoted to describing the process of creation and to explaining the ruler of Pagaruyung's descent from Iskandar Dzulkarnain. Fifteen *kebesaran* are listed in the same format as other *surat cap* and the list concludes with the words, "Inilah segala kebesaran dahaulat Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung pada masa dahulunya." The final line of this *surat* contains information about its purpose, although it may be, as van Ronkel indicated, that the text is incomplete. The Malay reads:

Syahadan lagi inilah duli Yang Dipertuan Pagaruyung mengaruniakan satu cap kepada Orangkaya Ma' Panghulu dua lagi isteri itulah adanya which indicates that this seal was granted by the Yang Dipertuan in Pagaruyung to Orangkaya Ma' Panghulu.<sup>37</sup> This note does suggest that in this case the letter itself is regarded as a seal or *cap* and that such pieces were granted to specific individuals. This letter makes no mention of safe passage in general way.

### 10. Rao

The Rao letter is kept in Padang Nunang which is now a small *kampung* some two kilometers from Rao and from the main road north from Bukit Tinggi to Sibolga. This region which is part of the present district of Pasaman is a gold producing area which is thought to have had early contacts with the kingdom of Minangkabau. Archaeological finds in Rao consist of statuary which may have some features in common with that of the Padang Lawas group of temples and a gold plaque which offers evidence of Tantric Buddhist devotion. Also in the same area was discovered an inscribed stone which although as yet unread, appears to have been written in a script similar to that of the Adityawarman inscriptions in the Pagaruyung area.<sup>38</sup> Written evidence of an early relationship between Pagaruyung and Rao can be found in Minangkabau *Kaba* and *Tambo*. In the *Kaba Cindur Mato* the daughter of Dang Tuanku and Putri Bungsu, Putri Sri Dunia, became queen of Rao.<sup>39</sup> According to one

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<sup>36</sup> Ph.S. van Ronkel, *Supplement-Catalogus der Maleische en Minangkabausche Handschriften in de Leidsche Universiteit-s-Bibliotheek*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1921, p. 243.

<sup>37</sup> Whether "dua lagi isteri" suggests "together with his wife" or "as well as a wife" is not clear.

<sup>38</sup> Satyawati Suleiman, *The Archaeology and History of West Sumatra*, Bulletin of the Research Centre of Archaeology of Indonesia, No. 12 (Jakarta: 1977), pages 2 and 6.

<sup>39</sup> Taufik Abdullah, "Some Notes on the Kaba Tjindoer Mato: An Example of Minangkabau Traditional Literature", *Indonesia*, 9, (1970), p. 9.



version of a *Tambo Minangkabau*, Bataks began to enter the Minangkabau regions of Rao and Lubuk Sikaping in about the sixteenth century. The people of Rao appealed to Pagaruyung and a member of the Minangkabau royal family was sent to Rao to become raja of the northern border. This raja became the Yang Dipertuan of Padang Nunang.<sup>40</sup>

The letter in question here is kept in the possession of the descendants of this Yang Dipertuan together with other family *pusaka* such as weapons, several stamps for seals and a European style military jacket from the early part of this century. I am particularly grateful to Pak Asran who showed me these items in 1989.<sup>41</sup> The letter itself is written in *jawi* script upon a large sheet of soft paper measuring 45 by 46 centimeters. The MS, which is now frail and damaged, has been stuck to a sheet of brown backing paper and no watermark is therefore visible. Insect damage had obscured some of the script and the MS cannot be fully deciphered because of this.

The letter carries a Pagaruyung *cap* and ten circular medallions which introduce the rulers of Siak, Padang Nunang, Jambi, Palembang, Banten, Aceh Inderagiri, Pariaman, Inderapura and Sungai Paguh. The seal itself is only partly legible and a reading of the inscription has been constructed by means of a comparison with the seal on OR. 4818 (see above) which appears to carry the same inscription. A possible reading of the seal is:

Sultan Seri Maharaja  
Diraja ibn Sultan [Hidayat?]  
Allah yang mempunyai Takhta Kerajaan  
dalam 'alam Minangkabau b-w-d-a  
Sultan Pulau Perca  
ini .....

There is no date on the MS although the Or 4818 letter refers to events which took place in 1815 A.D..

It is possible that the Rao *cap* did not originally belong on this letter. The square of paper upon which the *cap* has been imprinted appears to have been stuck onto the letter. In other words, the *cap* was not, originally, applied to the same sheet of paper as the rest of the letter. This is apparent in the illustration on Plate 10. During an examination of the original MS it was not possible to discover what, if anything, lies below the stuck-on square. The possibility arises, therefore, that this letter is a "forgery" which was given the dignity of a Pagaruyung *cap* cut, presumably, from another *surat cap*. The contents of the letter itself do exhibit some features which could lend themselves to this conclusion, not least of these being the prominence given to the region of Padang Nunang.

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<sup>40</sup> Datoek Batoeah Sango, *Tambo Alam Minangkabau: Iaitu Asal Usul Minangkabau segala Peraturan Adat dan Undang-Undang Hukum Disegala Negeri Jang Masuk Daerah Minangkabau*, 5th ed. Pajakumbuh: Limbago, c. 1966. Cited in Tsuyoshi Kato, *Matriliney and Migration. Evolving Minangkabau Traditions in Indonesia*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982., p. 40. The Rao region became important during the nineteenth century in the course of the Padri war. Padri leaders moved north and conquered Rao apparently in order to control the lucrative gold trade. See Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 178-181.

<sup>41</sup> An article about the descendants of the Yang Dipertuan of Padang Nunang which describes the *rumah gadang* and the *pusaka* which remain there appeared in the Minangkabau magazine *Limbago* in 1987, no. 4. *Limbago* is published by the Yayasan Ranah Minang and is edited by the writer, Wisran Hadi, of Padang and Pagaruyung.

The letter conveys the message that the Yang Dipertuan of Padang Nunang was a descendant of the Yang Dipertuan nan Sati in Pagaruyung, whose eldest child he is said to be. All the principle raja around Pulau Perca are named including the rulers of the regions of Aceh, Siak, Inderagiri, Jambi and Palembang and also the Dutch Kompeni in the ports surrounding Sumatra. It is commanded that the bearer of the letter should be protected and whoever disobeys this command will be struck by the *besi kawi*. He who holds this letter possesses the authority of Yang Dipertuan Ibadat in the region of Padang Nunang and is entitled Lebih D'oa Kirim. He has the protection of all the rulers already mentioned. He is also protected by God who gives his assistance to those who protect Lebih D'oa Kirim in his position as Yang Dipertuan. Those who would do harm to Lebih D'oa Kirim will in turn be destroyed by God and will be struck by the *besi kawi* as mentioned above.

This letter, then, unlike many of those already mentioned here, appears to represent a specific grant of authority to one person.

### 11. Sungai Paguh

This manuscript belongs to Puti Rasdewi Balun of Balun in the modern Kecamatan of Sungai Paguh.

The valley of Sungai Paguh lies between Alahan Panjang and Gunung Kerinci, to landward behind the heights of the Bukit Barisan. The hills around Sungai Paguh produced gold and, until the nineteenth century, this inland valley maintained a close relationship with the coastal centres on the other side of the mountain range which are known as the 10 Bandar.<sup>42</sup> These two regions were linked in a reciprocal trading relationship and they were governed by four *suku*.<sup>43</sup> In some periods a Yang Dipertuan in Sungai Paguh acted as representative of the Minangkabau court in this region and the Empat Suku derived traditions and authority from the Yang Dipertuan of Pagaruyung. As we saw in Chapter Six, the Raja Dua Celas came from Pagaruyung to Sungai Paguh in the 1680's with orders for the Empat Suku and the ruler's other subjects in the 10 Bandar.

The MS is well preserved and is treasured by its owners. The scroll is 148 by 33.5 cms. It consists of five pieces of paper joined together. At least two sheets have watermarks and one of these is the nineteenth century *pro patria*. The text is written in black ink with red used for emphasis and decoration. The seal stamped on this letter is that of Sultan 'Alam Bagagar. This was a title used by members of the Minangkabau royal house, particularly in the nineteenth century, but this is of little help in dating the MS since a seal could be applied long after its original manufacture.

This is a complex manuscript. It contains much of the same material as is found in other *surat cap*, although this is arranged in a different format. The text includes the same Arabic exordium, an account of descent from Iskandar Zulkarnain, a list of *kebesaran*, an enumeration of rulers in other parts of Sumatra who were descended from Pagaruyung, and mention of the *besi kawi*. These are all features of the *surat cap* genre which justify including the MS among other *surat cap*. But this is not a letter of credential. These features are arranged in the text in an individual way, and are set in the context of an exploration of the relationship between the Yang Dipertuan of

<sup>42</sup> Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 43. Pepper and later cotton was produced in the intermediate hills between Sungai Paguh and the 10 Bandar, Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 78.

<sup>43</sup> See, for instance, *Dagh-Register*, vol. 14 (1663), p. 696 and SWK 1682 VOC 1369, ff. 1068-1073.

Pagaruyung and the Empat Suku of Sungai Paguh. The foundation of the Empat Suku is related to the Minangkabau royal house and aspects of the ceremonial which attended visits from royal representatives are also detailed. In this sense, as a tracing of relations between Minangkabau and the periphery, the text might be considered as belonging, more than other *surat cap*, to the group of Minangkabau texts known as *Tambo*. The text shows how important Pagaruyung kingship was as a source of authority and tradition for the intermediate *rantau* courts.

## 12. ML. 396

The fragments of text in this collection which contain material of the *surat cap* type, including *kebesaran*, are catalogued as part B of the collection. They are mentioned by Voorhoeve in his article on Kerinci documents.<sup>44</sup>

## 13. KITLV Or. 414

Numbers 5 and 57 of this collection concern Minangkabau, although the numbering of the collection is not entirely clear. Illustrations of the MSS appear on Plate 10. The circumstances under which Voorhoeve collected documents in Kerinci are described by him in "Kerintji Documents".<sup>45</sup>

14. and 15. No additional details.

## 16. Sejarah Tuanku Batu Badan

The *surat cap*, which acts as an opening in the nineteenth century Barus chronicle *Sejarah Tuanku Batu Badan*, is transcribed in Drakard (ed.) *Sejarah Raja-Raja Barus*. The manuscript is in the possession of descendants of the Raja di Hilir family in Barus, north west Sumatra. The possibility that this letter was brought to Barus in the mid-eighteenth century by a Minangkabau prince named Sultan Abdul Jalil is discussed in Chapter Nine above.

## 17. ML 143. *Asal Usul Benkulu*

This MS has been made available in romanized form by Zulfahnur Z. Firdaus.<sup>46</sup>

## 18. ML. 27

Netscher's Dutch translation of this MS has been published as "Verzameling van Overleveringen van het Rijk van Manangkabou, uit het oorspronkelijk Maleisch Vertald", *Indisch Archief*, vol. 3, (1850), pp. 33-68.

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<sup>44</sup> P. Voorhoeve, "Kerintji Documents", BKI, vol. 126 (1970). pp. 399.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 369-99.

<sup>46</sup> Zulfahnur Z. Firdaus (ed.), *Asal Usul Bangkahulu*, Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1980, see pp. 1-10 on relations with Minangkabau.

# EDITED ROMANIZATION OF DULAURIER\NEWBOLD\KORN

## 1

al-wāthiq bi-ghayyāti 'l-lāhi'l-'azīm Maharaja Diraja ibn Sultān ibn Marhūm  
Sultān 'abdi 'l-jalīl mu'azzam

## 2

Inilah bab Sultan di Palembang ibn Sultan Indra Rahim anak Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung jua adanya. Inilah yang mula-mula jadi raja di negeri Palembang nene' Yang Dipertuan Megat Denom saudara Baginda Ibrus

## 3

Inilah bab Sultan di Jambi yang bernama Baginda Tuan anak Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung jua adanya. Inilah mula-mula jadi raja di negeri Jambi melimpah kepada ci' Jambi sembilan lurah

## 4

Inilah bab Sultan Inderagiri yang bernama Sultan Seri Kahil anak Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung. Inilah mula-mula jadi raja di negeri Inderagiri melimpah ka Luatan.

## 5

Inilah bab Sultan Berkemba Putih di Sungai Paguh anak Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung adanya. Inilah yang mula-mula jadi raja di negeri Sungai Paguh melimpah ke Bandar Sepuluh.

## 6

Inilah bab Sultan yang bernama Raja Megat di negeri Rokam anak Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung adanya. Inilah yang mula-mula jadi raja di negeri Rokam melimpah ka Kuria Benua Ampua

## 7

al-wāthiq bi-ghayyāti 'l-lāhi'l-'azīm Maharaja Diraja ibn Sultān ibn Marhūm  
Sultān 'abdi 'l-jalīl mu'azzam

## 8

Inilah bab Sultan Inderapura yang bernama Sultan Muhammad Syah kemawanganak Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung. Inilah yang mula-mula jadi raja di negeri Inderapura melimpah ke Muka-muka

## 9

Inilah bab Sultan di Piaman yang bernama Maharaja anak Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung. Inilah yang mula-mula jadi raja di negeri Piaman melimpah ka Tiku dan ka Kinali

## 10

Inilah bab Sultan di negeri Aceh yang bernama Seri Paduka Berpakat Rahim anak Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung. Inilah yang mula-mula jadi raja di negeri Aceh melimpah ka Tanah Laboh dan ka Batu Bara

## 11

Inilah bab Sultan di negeri Banten yang bernama Sultan Mahikata anak Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung. Inilah yang mula-mula jadi raja di negeri Bantan melimpah ka Batawi.

## 12

Inilah bab Sultan Tuanku di Siak anak Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung jua adanya. Inilah yang mula-mula menjadi raja di negeri Siak melimpah ka Patapahan dan ka Pulau Luan ka [Tan]jung Bunga.

Yā Bistūrīn Arāki sultān a'l-a'zam malika'l-mukarram zillu'llāh fi'l-'ālam al-mashūr fi'l-'Arab wa'l-'Ajam wa fi wujud 'l-makārim shahādat banī ādam yā Tuanku shāh 'ālam. Maka tersebutlah seperti di dalam Qur'ān fi kulli yaumin wa laila zalilu'l-hisāb ilā yaumi'd-dīn bihaqqi Muhammad sayyidi'l-mursalin wa'l-'āqiba li'l-muttaqin āmin yā rabba'l-'ālamīn.

Maka firman Allah ta'ala di dalam Qur'ān ar-rahman 'alā mulukīn an khalaqanā 'alā bayāni'sh-shams wa'l-qamar innī ja'il fi'l-ard khalīfa telah aku jadikan jin dan manusia akan menyembah aku di dalam dunia.

Maka diturunkan Allah ta'ala tanah daratan yang bernama Pulau Langkapuri antara Palembang dengan Jambi akan tempat raja yang asal anak Sultan Hidayat Allah ta'ala itulah yang diturunkan Allah ta'ala anantara awang dan kemawang, ialah anak Yang Dipertuan bernama Sultan Hidayat Allah Raja

Iskandar Zulkarnain negerinya terang berkuncikan besi yang amat hijau warnanya dipandang merah warnanya dipandang kunyung warnanya dipandang putih sekalian warnanya ada pandanya tiada dapat ditentang nyiat-nyiat.

Itulah kebesaran raja yang bertiga bersaudara, lagi melimpahkan 'adilnya dan kemurahannya pada segala hamba Allah dan pada segala raja-raja yang di bawahnya mengambil berkat[a] dan syifat Muhammad Habib al-rahmān, ialah sultan yang amat budiman lagi setiawan pada segala hamba Allah. Maka tersebutlah mata air di dalam surga janna al-n'aim. Maka bertumbuhlah segala tanam tanaman di dalam bumi maka hiduplah segala nafas hamba Allah sebab membauan-bauan yang harum di balai yang maha mulia.

Maka adalah laksananya 'ambar dan kesturi berkata daulat hadrat sultan yang tiga bersaudara. Ialah Sultan Seri Maharaja Alif yang kerajaan di negeri Rum nan seorang bernama Seri Maharaja Dipang yang kerajaan di negeri Cina nan seorang bernama Seri Maharaja Diraja berdaulat yang kerajaan di Pulau Emas yang kasihan di dalam 'alam Menangkabau āmin yā rabba'l-'ālamīn.

Kemudian dari itu maka tersebutlah akan kebesaran daulat tuanku di dalam 'alam Minangkabau: ialah sultan yang menaruhkan mahkota nabi sulaiman; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan tanun sangsang kala mematukan dirinya sepatu-' setahun akan bilangan 'umur dunia; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan kayu gamat dikerat dipetak sekerat tinggal di raja Rum nan sekerat tinggal di raja Cina sekerat tinggal di raja 'alam Menangkabau; ialah Sultan yang menaruhkan manau kirai nan membangunkan dirinya; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan parang emas; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan jangut jengki; ialah Sultan yang menaruhkan emas kudarat Allah yang bementi seperti manusia; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan emas jati-jati di dalam pendudukan; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan pohan Naga Taruwan bertatahkan ratna mutu manikam; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan sapit pinang kepala bara mangatikan sendirinya; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan curi' Simandang Giri sumbing seratus sembilan puluh pemutus Si Katimuno; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan Gunung Bangsi tempat raja Maharaja ke Gunung Berapi bukitnya kemayatnya batu emas sungainya airnya bunga; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan timba tetaran segera jantan; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan lembing lembahara bersarungan kayu karu ditulisnya tilawat al-koran; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan kris alang bara; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan lapi' daun hilalang disentangkan m-h-a-r-t-i dilarangkan maharungut sama asal dengan negeri ini; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan gajah sakti; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan air laut tawar sehari pelayaran; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan Gunung Berapi sendirinya penjariangan tempat bulah perinduw tempat burung Liar Mati; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan kipas batu; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan gendang Saliguri; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan memongan jejatan; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan gong Semendang bunyinya anantara awang dan kemawang; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan balai bertiangkan teras jelatang dan baperan akar Landong; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan taboh Pulut-Pulut bergentang dengan jangat tuma; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan kuda Semborani; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan gentanya Samedra' sumbing hati sara-sehari didengarkan daripada kanan bunyinya orang mengadap Duli Seri, bunyinya dari kanan [kiri?] orang memohonkan titah; ialah sultan yang

menaruhkan kerbau Sibinuang Sati; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan ayam biring Sangganani; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan sumurnya Siketang; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan kelapa nira bali; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan Lengg[n]di hitam jadi sendirinya; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan padi setinja Bani santapan Daulat Yang Dipertuan tengah hari; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan padi serumpun dendam kemara; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan bunga Seri Menjadi baunnya sehari perjalanan ditanam sehari tumbuh sehari berdaun sehari itu pula berbunga sehari itu pula berbuah; ialah sultan yang menaruhkan bunga Cempaka biru; ialah sultan tidurnya berbungkus timur bangunnya bergendang nobat khalifat Allah Daulat Yang Dipertuan Sati; ialah bab nuasa habib Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung.

Orang yang membawa di ya'ni warkat al-ikhlas ini tolong bertolong bicara kebajikan jikalau ada bertemu barang di mana ada tempat laut atau darat sekarang hendaklah tolong bertolong karena kata Allah ta'ala yang menyatakan tahun bi'l-barr wa'l-taquā. Haraplah kami dahulu Allah kemudian muhammad jangan syak [doubtful] segala anak cucu kami serta kerapatan orang besar-besar kami dan kerapatan segala saudagar kami dan kerapatan nankhoda kami hendaklah dipegang 'adat yang dahulu-dalulu daripada nenek moyang kita. Jikalau dibawanya lalu ke Siak dan Nilawan dan Patapahan baik ke Kampar Kiri ke Kampar Kanan jangan dianya dibinasakan atau di laut baik ke Palembang dan Inderagiri baik Rokam baik ke dusun Rambai Tembusi baik ke Batu Bara baik ke Pulau Pinang baik ke Melacca dan ke Kedah baik lalu ke Jawa ke Betawi baik ke Susu ke Telaboh baik lalu ke Tra dan ke Bangkahulu 'adat kepada orang kompeni yang punya perintah di dalam kosta barat Pulau Andelas mahras[ayn] lagi keras, memegangkan hakim yang dahulu-dahulu adanya.

Demikian pula hubaya segala orang yakin kita tuhan azam wa-jalil tegoh-teguh kita kepada sumpah setia serta bisa kawi nenek moyang yang dahulu-dahulu. Jika dibinasakan jua dianya dimakan kutu' Yang Dipertuan di Pagaruyung yang setia. Kemudian dari itu padi tiada menjadi huma ra'ayat tiada kembang, jika dipeliharakan dianya padi menjadi anak buah ra'ayat menjadi kembang dan di mana dianya duduk dan barang di mana negeri tempat duduknya selamat baik keliling Pulau Perca baik segala keliling laut dan darat tempat kata yang sebenarnya ya na'am al-mauliya wa ia nām al-nasir wa Allah l'a'lam 123456789.

al-wāthiq bi-ghayyāti 'l-lāhi'l-'azīm Maharaja Diraja ibn Sultān ibn Marhūm  
Sultān 'abdi 'l-jalīl mu'azzam

# EDITED transliteration of ML. 483

(Indented Text comparable with Dulaurier/Newbold/Korn)

Bism' llāh al-Rahmān al-Rahīm. Al-hamdu li'llīhi rabbu'l -'ālamīn wa'l-  
'āqiba li'l muttaqīn yabi satwa Allah amaraka Sultanu'l 'azam maliku'l-  
mukarram zillul'llah fi'l-'alam al-masyhur fi'l-'Arab wa'l-'Ajam bilifati  
fi'l hawajum shahāda nabi adam. Ya Tuanku syāh 'alam.

Maka tersebutlah, adapun tatkala diturunkan Allah ta'ala Adam dengan Siti  
Hawa ke atas dunia ialah pada bukit Syarful Basyar Allah ialah antara  
masyriq dan maghibi, antara awang dan kemawang, antara bumi dengan  
langkit, pada tanah Hasyin pada perabandaran biat al-makmur. Itulah negeri  
yang bernama Darussalam dan Darulasyak. Yang haning sendirinya tempat  
menyatakan empat martabat pada bangsa. Suatu 'Adam Fabir namanya  
dan kedua 'Adam Sufa namanya; ketiga Ibu 'Adam Basyarillah  
namanya; keempat 'Adam Khalifa Allah namanya.

Maka berbantahlah segala anak Adam yang ampat puluh ampat. Setengah  
mengatakan anak Adam itu sembilan puluh sembilan. Ialah berbantah  
setengah mengatakan dirinya patut akan jadi raja. Seperti berbantah karena  
kebesaran. Maka berbantahlah Adam dengan Siti Hawa sebab perbantahan  
anaknya mengatakan dirinya seoranglah patut akan jadi raja.

Maka berkatalah Adam khalifa Allah kepada isterinya, "Pergilah kamu  
mencari anak dengan tiada bapak. Aku hendak mencari anak dengan tiada ibu.  
Maka berjalanlah seorang ke Masyrik dan seorang berjalan ke Maghrib. Maka  
berjalanlah Adam Kkhalifa Allah. Dengan takdir Allah ta'ala serta dengan  
hiradatnya dan hidayatnya serta dengan 'asyiknya. Maka terbitlah manikam  
yang sempurna dalam kandil gilang gemilang rupanya pernai akan rupa  
manis, tiada dapat ditentang nyata, lebih daripada cahaya bulan dan  
matahari.

Maka dengan takdir Allah ta'ala maka dipeliharakannya bunga air mula serta  
dengan hidayat Allah ta'ala dan serta iradatya dan kudaratnya dengan takdir  
Allah ta'ala lahirlah anaknya, ialah anaknya yang namanya [tear] Sultan  
Hidayat Allah akan raja di dalam dunia. Maka berkatalah Adam khalifa Allah  
siapa memelihara akan anakku ini. Akalnya terlalu tajam. Rupahnya terlebih  
permai umpama bulan empat belas hari bulan tiada dapat ditentang nyata.  
Maka sembah Habil dan Kabil, Ruhun dan Nuru jani. Kamilah memeliharakan  
saudara kami". Tatkala itulah sembah maklum titah berajo yang mana  
kala raja, menolak sembah, raja dimakan bisa kawi, karena raja itu tiada  
kaya dek emas melainkan kaya disembah wa ama ba'du.

Kemudian pun daripada itu maka menajatliah Adam Khalifa Allah pada bukit  
Jabal Al-kaf. Maka diturunkan Allah lah mangkota kepada Adam Khalifa Allah  
serta dengan curik' Cumandang kiri pedang melawani. Maka turunlah Adam  
Khalifa Allah pada padang dzulkarnainai serta mengejankan anaknya Sultan  
Hidayat Allah seperti firman di dalam Qur'an fi kulli yaum wa laila zalilu'l-



**hisāb ilā yaumi'd-dīn bihaqqi Muhammad sayyidu'l-mursalīn wa'l-āqilba li'l-muttaqīn. Amīn yā rabbu'l-ālimin.**

Maka firman Allah ta'ala di dalam Qur'an ar-rahman 'alā muluk an khalāqnā 'alā bayāni'sy-syams wa'l-quamar. Innī ja'il fi'l-ard khalifa telah aku jadikan jinn dan manusia akan menyembah aku di dalam dunia ini.

Maka diturunkan Allah ta'ala seekor burung lagi pandai berkata-kata kepada Sultan Hidayat Allah Iskandar Zulkarnaini khalifa Allah fi'l-'alam Johan berdaulat b'aniat Allah Adam bibarakati said il anam. Burung itulah mencari tanah daratan yang bernama Pulau Langkapuri. Maka berlayarlah Sultan Hidayat Allah mencari tanah daratan serta ka Langkapuri menteri, penghulu, hulubelang ialah Mara Nadin, Tuan Bungsu, kudarat Allah iaitu Temenggung alat cemari Si Pahit Si Raja Hitam sambung hulubelang Maharaja Indah, Maharaja Bungsu Sang Syita, Puteri Jani' hatta berberapa lamanya

Maka diturunkan Allah ta'ala tanah daratan yang bernama Pulau Alangkapuri antara Palembang dengan Jambi akan tempat raja asal anak Sultan Hidayatullah. Itulah yang diturunkan Allah ta'ala antara awang dan kemawang, ialah anak yang dipertuan nan bernama Sultan Hidayatullah Raja Iskandar Zulkarnaini khalifa Allah fi'l-'alam Johan berdaulat liba'na baitulah Allah ta'ala 'alim al-adwam. Bibarakat saidil- nama negerinya bertuang [tear] berkuncikan basyi yang amat hijau warnanya dipandang merah warnanya, dipandang kuning warnanya, dipandang putih warnanya, tiada dapat ditentang nyata.

Itulah kebesyaran raja yang bertiga bersaudara, lagi melimpahkan 'adilnya dan kemurahannya kepada segala hamba Allah dan kepada segala raja-raja yang di bahwanya mengambil berkat dan manfaat kebesarannya. Berkat Muhammad habib al-rahman ialah Sultan yang amat budiman lagi setiawan pada segala hamba Allah. Maka terbitlah mata air di dalam surga janatul-naim. Maka tumbuhlah segala tanam-tanaman di dalam bumi ini. Maka hiduplah segala napas hamba Allah sebab membauni baun-baun yang harum di balai-balai yang maha mulia.

Maka adalah laksyana hamba dan kasturi berkat daulat hadrat Sultan yang betiga bersaudara; ialah Sultan Syeri Maharaja Alif yang kerajaan di negeri Ruhum nan seorang ialah Sultan Syeri Maharaja Dipang yang kerajaan di negeri Cina nan seorang ialah nan bernama Sultan Syeri Maharaja Diraja berdaulat yang keraja'an di Pulau Emas yang amat kasyian di dalam 'Alam Minangkabau. Amin ya rabbi'l-'alamain.

Amaba'adu pun kemudian daripada itu maka tersebutlah kebesyaran daulat tuanku di dalam 'alam Minangkabau. Maka ialah Sultan nan menaruhkan mangkota nabi Sulaiman; ialah Sultan nan menaruhkan tanun Sangsyita Kala mematukkan dirinya sendirinya sepatuk setahun akan bilangan umur dunia; ialah Sultan yang menaruhkan kayu kamat

dibagai tiga sebagai kepada **Sultan Syeri Maharaja Alif** yang mempunyai takhta kerajaan di dalam negeri **Ruhum s-p-t-y-a-k-n** kepada **Sultan Syeri Maharaja Dipang** yang turun ke benua Cina melimpahkan 'adilnya kepada segala hamba Allah sebagai tinggal kepada **Sultan Syeri Maharaja Diraja**; ialah yang turun ke tanah **Pagaruyung** yang mempunyai takhta keraja'an di dalam **Pulau Emas** yang melimpahkan 'adilnya di dalam 'alam **Minangkerbau**. **Ialah Sultan** yang menaruhkan mana **Cumandang Giri** membangunkan dirinya sendirinya. **Ialah Sultan** yang menaruhkan taring emas; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan **Janggut Janggi**. **Ialah Sultan** yang menaruhkan emas pada kudarat Allah rupahnya seperti rupa manusia; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan emas jatah jati patah dalik pendagangnya. **Ialah Sultan** yang menaruhkan pohon naga tarun yang bertakhtakan ratna mutu manikam. **Ialah Sultan** yang menaruhkan upih pinang kepala baru', mengatubakan dirinya sendirinya dengan takdir Allah t'aala. **Ialah Sultan** yang menaruhkan **Curik Cumandang Giri** sumbang nan seratus sembilan puluh pemunuh **Si Kati Munuh**. **Ialah Sultan** yang menaruhkan gunung bongsu tempat segala wali Allah diam. **Ialah Sultan** yang menaruhkan gunung **Barapi** awal perindu di atasnya tempat segala burung lira berhampun mati. **Ialah Sultan** yang menaruhkan bukit bergombo' sati; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan balai batu lantai batu; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan **Sungai emas** airnya bunga; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan lembing lembuhara nan bertetaran syakar jantan syarungnya kayu karu tulisnya salawat al-Quran. **Ialah Sultan** yang menaruhkan karis alang bari jikalau disintak maharani disarungkan .... **Ialah Sultan** yang menaruhkan lapi' daun ilalang; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan **Gajah Sakti**; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan air laut tawar sehari pelayaran; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan kipas batu; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan memongan jantan; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan sigagar antu bunyinya antara awang dan kemawang; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan tiang balai taras jilatang; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan tabuh pulut-pulut; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan gendang saliguri; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan kuda sembarani; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan kabau **Si Binuwang Sati**; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan ayam nan biring sanggonani; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan padi serumpun dinalam[?] santapan daulat yang dipertuan; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan bunga syeri mencari; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan bunga cempaka biru; ialah **Sultan** yang menaruhkan cib tanda tangan titah daulat yang dipertuan di **Pagaruyung** juga adanya.

Kami kurniakan kepada orang nan membawa cib ini. Jikalau barang kemana-manalah dibawanya. Baik ka **Kampar Kiri** baik ke **Kampar Kanan**. Lalu ka **Aces surambi Mekah**. Lalu ke **Jawa** ke **Betawi** baik lalu ke batang rantau sekuliling **Pulau Perca** inilah. Baik ka timur dan ka Barat baik ke **Selatan** dan ka **Utara** baik tiap-tiap bandar. Baik tiap-tiap **dusun** nan tidak boleh dibinasakan orang nan membawa cib, ini jika dibinasakan orang nan membawa cib ini dimakan kutuk titah daulat yang dipertuan besyar **Pagaruyung** juga adanya seperti firaman Allah ta'ala di dalam Quran: Ja'ilum fil-ardhi khalifah. Telah Aku jadikan raja di dalam dunia akan ganti Aku.

Jikalau tiada dipermuliakan orang nan membawa cib besar ini dimakan bisa kawi titah daulat yang dipertuan nan besar di **Pagaruyung** juga adanya juga padi tiada menjadi anak buah tiada kembang. Itulah sumpah satia titah daulat yang dipertuan besyar di **pagarruyung** jua adanya kepada segala hamba ra'yatnya isi bumi lai

bakuaso asa gagak hitam isi awah putih dikalikan dalam digantung tinggi nan sedalam laut nan setinggi langit tiada berubah selama-lama. Tammatlah kalam wallahu alam.

## TRANSLATION OF DULAURIER\NEWBOLD\KORN MS.

Ya Bisturin, I see you as the greatest Sultan, shadow of God on earth, the lord of noble things, famous among the Arabs and non-Arabs and everywhere that good things exist. The proof for mankind yes great lord of the world, as it is said in the Qur'an in every day and every night remaining under judgement until the last day, accountable to Muhammad, the lord of messengers and to the outcome for pious people, Amen lord of the worlds.

Them as God, may he be exalted, decreed in the Koran of the merciful one (to the king [?]) that we created as a proof the sun and the moon. I am placing on the earth a Khalif to represent me. Then I created spirits and humans to worship me in the world.

Then Allah, may he be exalted, lowered the land which is known as Pulau Langkapuri between Palembang and Jambi as a place for the original ruler who is a child of Sultan Hidayat Allah, it was he who was sent down to the airy interspace between earth and sky. He is the child of the Yang Dipertuan whose name is Sultan Hidayat Allah Raja Iskandar Zulkarnain whose negeri is luminous and bound with iron the colour of which is intensely green to look at, it is seen as the colours red, yellow and white. It appears to be all colours and is never clearly manifested.

These are the marks of greatness of the three brother rulers whose justice and generosity flows to all God's subjects and to all the rulers who are below them and who receive the blessings and intercession of Muhammad, beloved of the merciful one. He is the Sultan who is very wise and also constant to all God's servants. It is told how the spring of water flowed in the heavenly garden of delights. Then all the plants on the earth sprouted and all God's servants who breathe came to life because of the fragrant scents in the illustrious palace. Then like amber and musk the royal majesties, the three brother Sultans, spoke. These were the Sultan Seri Maharaja Alif who rules in Negeri Rum and Seri Maharaja Dipang who rules in Negeri Cina and also the one named Seri Maharaja Diraja Berdaulat who rules in Pulau Emas, the island of gold, who shows his favour in the Alam Minangkabau. Amen Lord of all worlds.

Here is a statement of the greatness of his highness the lord in the Alam Minangkabau: he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the crown of the prophet Sulaiman; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the loom Sangsang Kala which strikes on its own and makes one strike a year, the same number as the age of this world; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the Kamat wood (from which Alexander's seal was made) which has been divided and a part of which rests with the ruler of Rum, a part with the ruler of Cina and a part with the ruler of Alam Minangkabau; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the shaking rattan which rises on its own; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the golden parang; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the beard of Jengki; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the gold endowed with God's power which has the form of a human; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the pure gold which is carried [in a sling?]; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the tree Naga Taruwan studded with all kinds of jewels; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the pinang scissors which operate on their own; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the dagger Simandang Giri which has a hundred and ninety notches from striking Sikatimuno; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping

Gunung Bangsi the place of Raja Maharaja extending to Gunung Berapi the place for his body, the stones of gold in his rivers which run with water like flowers; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping .....; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the spear, Lembing Lembura, the sheath of which is inscribed with readings from the Koran; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the rapier Kris which is red hot; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the mat of Lalang leaves woven in a circle which it is forbidden to ... and which has the same origins as this *negeri*; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the elephant sakti, with supernatural power; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the sea of fresh water which is a day's sailing; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the mountain Berapi, which flames on its own, the place of the sacred bamboo and of the birds known as Liar Mati; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the fan made from stone; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the drum made from Saliguri; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping momongan jejatan [?]; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the gong Semendang which sounds in the interspace between earth and sky; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the palace which is held up by pillars made from the heart of stinging nettles and cross timbers made from Lamdong roots; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the drum which is made from Pulut-Pulut plants and is covered by the sliced skins of lice; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the horse Semborani; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping a bell called Semudrak, and each day when its sound is heard from the right the people present themselves before Duli Seri, when its sound is heard from the right [sic] the people ask to be given the royal word; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the buffalo Sibinuang Sati; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the unconquerable yellow-legged fighting cock Sangganani; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the well Siketang; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the coconut juice of the royal palace; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the tree called Leggu[n]di which turns black on its own; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the rice Setinja bani (from the palace of the sons of Adam) which Daulat Yang Dipertuan eats in the middle of the day; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the rice serumpun dendam kemara; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the flower named Seri Menjadi the scent of which lasts for a days journey, which is planted for one day and sprouts in a day, which acquires leaves in a day and also flowers for a day and fruits for a day; he is the Sultan who has in his keeping the blue Cempaka flower; he is the Sultan who sleeps enwrapped in the east and who awakes to the sound of the nobat, the representative of God, Yang Dipertuan nan Sati[sakti] in Pagaruyung; this is the seal (cib) of the grandson of Yang Dipertuan in Pagaruyung who is dear to God.

As for those who carry this sincere and frank epistle assist them with virtuous discourse. If they are met with anywhere on sea or on land assist them because of the word of God, may he be exalted, which was revealed with purity and plenty. We trust that none of our grandchildren doubt Allah and after him Muhammad, and that all our great men join together and all our merchants join together and all our captains join together in order to observe the customs of the past which come from our ancestors.

If this is conveyed to Siak and to Nilawan, to Patapahan and also to Kampar Kiri and to Kampar Kanan do not let them be harmed. Or on the sea or to Palembang and Inderagiri, be it to Rokan or to the villages of Ramabai Tembusi, or to Batu Bara or to Pulau Penang or to Melaka and to Kedah, or be it to Jawa, to Batavia or to Susu or to Telaboh the same, or be it to Tra and to Bangkulu. This usage extends to the people of the Company whose government on the west coast garrisons of Pulau Andelas is very harsh. Cleave to the judgements of the past.

Thus by all means to all of our people who hold sure knowledge of our lord, might and greatness upon him, we affirm our oath of loyalty and the Bisa Kawi of our ancestors from the past. If anyone destroys this he will be struck by the curse of the Yang Dipertuan in Pagaruyung who is constant. Then his padi will not come into being and the population will not spread. If they are protected, however, the padi will flourish and dependants and people will increase. And wherever he may live in whatever negeri it will be safe, this applies all around Pulau Perca around the coast or inland these words will be true. So it is, the client, the one who is helped, God knows best.123456789

## APPENDIX FIVE

## Eighteenth Century Division in the Minangkabau Royal House

Sultan Inderma Syah died in 1698. As far as it is possible to determine from VOC reports, he was succeeded by his son, Yang Dipertuan Paduka Seri Ahmad Syah (sometimes Ahmad Syah Gagar Alam) of Pagaruyung and his grandson, Iskandar Muda Johan Berdaulat Seri Sultan Inderma Syah of Suruaso.<sup>1</sup> The new Yang Dipertuan Inderma Syah's mother was a daughter of the old Inderma Syah, and he was therefore the nephew of Ahmad Syah.

Evidence that a second court, once probably known as Negeri, but in the late seventeenth century becoming known as Pagaruyung, emerged from the Raja Dua Celas rebellion described in Chapter Six. Friction between the two centres of Suruaso and Pagaruyung is evident from the 1680's onwards. In 1693 a letter had been brought to Padang by the usual royal envoy, Maharaja Laxamana, but text referred to the Panglima Raja as the proxy of the king in Pagaruyung which suggests that it came from that court.<sup>2</sup> VOC scribes omitted the titling and introduction to the letter in this instance so that it is not possible to be sure whether it was sent in the name of Inderma Syah of Suruaso.

In the early eighteenth century Company servants at Padang were still not properly familiar with the name Pagaruyung and the importance of that centre, and they still referred to Suaruaso as the capital. Apart from the titles used in letters from the court, and some comments in VOC reports, evidence that more than one royal centre was active at this time comes in a letter from Sultan Inderma Syah in which he describes himself as the son of Sultan Ahmad Syah and "chief of the kings" in Minangkabau. It is not clear from the Dutch translation which ruler is the "hoofd".<sup>3</sup> Much later, in 1727, Inderma Syah described himself as a prince of "this land which is ruled by two kings".<sup>4</sup>

There are several references in the records to the ruler at Suruaso being at war with the *panghulu* of Lima Kaum and Batipu in the interior and this may have been due to his association with the VOC.<sup>5</sup> Hostilities between Suruaso and the gold region of Padang Ganting are mentioned in VOC records from 1718. The Islamic "priest", Sijunjung, was said to have stirred up the the people against the Raja.<sup>6</sup> In 1720-21 Inderma Syah of Suruaso was also said to have been at war with Lima Kaum.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VI, pp. 6-7 and Macleod, 1906 II p. 1448.

<sup>2</sup> SWK 1694 VOC 1536, f. 301r.

<sup>3</sup> SWK 1704 VOC 1677, f. 20r.

<sup>4</sup> SWK 1728 VOC 2074, f. 117.

<sup>5</sup> Antagonism between Raja Gagar Alam and Batipu is mentioned in SWK 1714 VOC 1841, f. 69.

<sup>6</sup> SWK 1718 VOC 1895, 15 and SWK 1719 VOC 1911, f. 28.

<sup>7</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VII, p. 538; SWK 1720 VOC 1926, f. 80; and SWK 1721 VOC 1946, f. 44.

VOC records give little information about these internal wars, but we may speculate that they were linked to anti-Dutch feeling and an objection to royal contacts with the VOC. Conceivably these tensions represent a changing balance in the interior and the beginning of an antagonism towards the royal establishment which was more clearly manifested in the early nineteenth century, during the Paderi war. But the situation was also highly fluid, allegiances appear to have shifted frequently and both branches were more assertive with the Dutch than hitherto.



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